

ETHICS FOR THE VERY YOUNG



A PHILOSOPHY CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ERIK KENYON, DIANE TERORDE-DOYLE,
AND SHARON CARNAHAN

Ethics for the Very Young

The *Big Ideas for Young Thinkers Book Series* brings together the results of recent research about precollege philosophy. There has been sizable growth in philosophy programs for young people. The book series provides readers with a way to learn about all that is taking place in this important area of philosophical and educational practice. It brings together work from around the globe by some of the foremost practitioners of philosophy for children. The books in the series include single-author works as well as essay collections. With a premium placed on accessibility, the book series allows readers to discover the exciting world of precollege philosophy.

Series Editor: Thomas Wartenberg

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A Philosophy Curriculum for Early Childhood Education

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Sharon Carnahan

Foreword by
Thomas Wartenberg

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Foreword

Teaching philosophy to children as young as four years old! If that sounds preposterous to you, you have another thing coming. In *Ethics for the Very Young*, Erik Kenyon, Diane Terorde-Doyle, and Sharon Carnahan demonstrate not only that children as young as four can engage in philosophical discussions of ethical issues but also that such discussions provide a very important and largely overlooked opportunity for educators.

This is because very young children who discuss ethical questions with their peers and teachers begin to develop an understanding of the significance of ethical issues that they would usually only acquire much later in their lives. The authors argue for the importance of helping children understand ethical issues, pointing out that children are confronted by ethical issues all the time. What they lack, and what ethical discussions in their classrooms can provide, is the ability to discuss important issues with their peers in an open manner that allows for the possibility of disagreement.

A unique feature of *Ethics for the Very Young* is the collaboration of its authors. They are a philosophy professor, a preschool director, and a psychology professor. Fusing their different approaches and experiences, Kenyon, Terorde-Doyle, and Carnahan present a model for introducing ethical inquiry into preschool classrooms that is easily adopted by early childhood educators. Bringing with them knowledge of both philosophy and developmental psychology, they are able to incorporate both into their model for engaging young children in discussions of deep and important questions. I fully expect this book to initiate dramatic changes in preschool classrooms.

The first part of *Ethics for the Very Young* explains the model the authors have developed for ethical inquiry in preschool classrooms. They explain what a teacher needs to do to include ethics discussions in his or her

classroom. As part of this, they also provide a convincing rationale for why this is important.

One of the central innovations made by the authors of *Ethics for the Very Young* is to allow children to, as they put it, think with their bodies. A barrier to including ethical discussions in preschool has been the short attention span of these young children and the challenges this poses for holding abstract discussions. This has meant that one couldn't just take materials developed for elementary schools and use them with younger students.

So, in their preschool classrooms, the authors have instituted a series of games as precursors to philosophical discussions. If they are going to discuss the nature of self-control, for example, they start off by having children mix paints, thereby giving them the experience of "losing control" by putting in too much of one color. This primes them for listening to a story and discussing the value of moderation.

Such innovative thinking is evident throughout the lesson plans presented in the second and third parts of *Ethics for the Very Young*. This portion of the book contains lesson plans that early childhood educators can use in their classrooms. These innovative lesson plans use games, dialogical reading, and art projects to encourage young pupils to engage in discussions of ethical big ideas, such as the importance of cooperation and what makes something just or fair.

There are two series of lessons—one based on ancient Greek ethics and one on modern ethics. The former lesson plans emphasize questions of what makes a moral character, while the latter ones focus more centrally on questions of right and wrong. This reflects a shift in ethics itself.

Whereas the Greeks were more concerned with figuring out what sort of character was the best one for people to have, modern ethical theorists, such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, focus on the question of what makes an action moral or immoral. As a result, they propose different principles of morality.

Despite this austere background, ethical issues are ones that even young children encounter in their lives. If one student gets a treat that others don't, is that fair? What if that student has won a contest? Does that change things? What justifies the answers you have given to these questions? Such issues are precisely ones that you will learn how to get your students to discuss from the lesson plans included in this book.

In sum, *Ethics for the Very Young* is a great resource for early childhood educators. You will learn how to bring ethical discourse into their classrooms in a way that their students will thoroughly enjoy. Parents, too, can learn how to make their conversations with their children deeper and more significant. Finally, anyone interested in the potential for introducing ethical

conversations into their interactions with young children will find that this book provides them with exciting ideas for doing so.

Ethics for the Very Young brings together ideas from the great philosophers of the past two and a half millennia with best practices from early childhood education to produce an exciting array of ideas for innovating in preschool and elementary school classrooms. It is a gem.

Thomas Wartenberg

Part I

**INTEGRATING PHILOSOPHY INTO
EARLY EDUCATION**

Chapter 1

Origin of the Project and Acknowledgments

This book sets out a method and curriculum for guiding children as young as four years old in discussions of ethics. It fuses best practices in early education and philosophy for children (P4C), and it grounds them in current developmental psychology. It is child centered, starting from questions arising in the daily lives of the young: What is bravery? What is a friend? What makes something fair? These questions are posed through picture books (from P4C practice), art projects (from Reggio Emilia), and games (promoting self-regulation skills). Through scaffolded discussions, children come to expand their working vocabulary for ethical concepts.

Just as importantly, children develop their ability to enter into useful discussions of difficult questions. Such discussions, we have found, have a profound impact on how children interact with each other and how teachers listen and respond to children's ideas. In short, *Ethics for the Very Young* aims at nothing short of a culture shift in early education practice. It provides an example of innovative pedagogy for future teachers, a means of professional development (particularly via book clubs) for early educators already in the field, and a textbook for high school or college instructors looking to teach ethical theory via a service-learning model.

The lessons contained here are the product of extensive collaborations: between Rollins College and six Orlando schools, undergraduates and children, philosophers and early educators. This experiential and experimental approach to learning reflects the same commitment to progressive education and the pragmatic liberal arts that produced the college's most famous alumnus, Fred Rogers (class of 1951). Rollins's long-standing role in the progressive movement provides the deep history of this book.

Rollins College was founded in 1885 by the Congregational Church with the aim of preparing youth for a “virtuous, happy and useful life.” Rollins’s first students pursued this goal through a rigid course of lectures, quizzes, and recitations from memory of mostly Greek and Latin texts. All this changed with the appointment of Hamilton Holt: journalist, political activist, and president of the college from 1925 to 1949. Holt aligned with figures like John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Maria Montessori. Where these reformers focused on primary and secondary schools, Holt saw the promise of their learner-centered ideas for college education.

In 1931, Holt invited leading educators to campus, Dewey among them, for a conference on reforming college curricula around progressive ideals. Putting theory into practice, Holt replaced lecture halls with large seminar tables, formulated a conference plan with two-hour blocks for informal collaboration between students and faculty, and instituted a curriculum that would be called today a self-designed major *and* self-designed general education. It was this curriculum that allowed Fred Rogers to follow his own passions as an undergraduate. His groundbreaking work with young children can be seen as growing out of its ethos.

Ethics for the Very Young, like Fred Rogers’s initiatives, builds on Rollins’s deep history, representing a fusion of the founders’ goal of preparing virtuous, happy, and useful students with Holt’s innovative forays into experiential learning. Rollins’s curriculum has changed four times since Holt’s day, but his commitments to innovation, experimentation, and experiential, student-centered learning are written into the college’s DNA. We see this today in two of Rollins’s most forward-looking centers.

Rollins’s Child Development and Student Research Center (CDC) was founded in 1975 as part of the Psychology Department. It blends elements of Dewey’s Lab School at Chicago and the art-based curriculum of Reggio Emilia. In 2017, the CDC moved into a new home, Hume House, where a staff of six teachers now serves forty-two students, ages two to five, regularly collaborating with undergraduate classes from eight departments as far-flung as physics and German. The Center for Leadership and Community Engagement, meanwhile, coordinated thirty courses designated as Community Engagement in 2017–2018 for an undergraduate population of 2,600.

The prompt for the present project was the launching of yet another curriculum, the college’s seventh, which is organized around thematic “neighborhoods” (with a nod to Fred Rogers). Gloria Cook—professor of music, close friend of Fred and Joanne Rogers, and mayor of the Innovate, Create, Elevate neighborhood—pushed a visiting professor of philosophy and classics, Erik Kenyon, to design a community engagement course for the new curriculum. The connection between his work in ancient philosophy and

the immediate needs of the surrounding community were not immediately apparent.

Working with the Community Engagement Office, Kenyon came to realize that the world stands in dire need of something ancient philosophy has to offer: the art of asking questions and engaging in useful dialogue. As standardized testing has come to dominate K–12 education, a kind of rote learning has snuck back into American schools. Within the context of the echo chambers created by electronic media, such a development makes the breakdown of civic discourse seem almost inevitable. Our project sets out to address this distinctly twenty-first-century problem by drawing resources from the last twenty-four centuries of Western thought.

The first of these community engagement courses, *Socrates and the Art of Living* (spring 2015), worked with fifth- and sixth-grade gifted students at Fern Creek Elementary School in Orlando, Florida. Rollins undergraduates, all in their second semester, puzzled their way through Plato's Socratic dialogues and, following the model laid out in Tom Wartenberg's *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, designed lessons to engage children in discussion of philosophical ideas using picture books.

Midway through the project, scheduling problems forced the middle school to miss two weeks of lessons. Lisa Ryan Musgrave, professor of philosophy and mother of two CDC students, suggested reaching out to Rollins's own lab school. When asked about an impromptu collaboration, Diane Terorde-Doyle, who was then head teacher, replied, "Why not!" So students took a set of lessons designed for fifth- and sixth-grade gifted students and used them with three- and four-year-olds. While the first lesson was more or less a disaster, enough progress had been made by the fourth that we decided to return to the project in a more intentional way.

The next fall, Kenyon taught *Philosophy for Kids* as a Rollins College conference course (a first-year seminar program and current incarnation of Holt's conference plan). Students worked closely with Doyle to create lessons that were developmentally appropriate for pre-K children. Through much trial and even more error, we distilled and adapted Wartenberg's methods into a new approach that revolves around three philosophy rules (we listen, we think, we respond) and a lesson pattern that brings together games, storybooks, and art projects.

The following term, spring 2016, we put our approach to the test as a new class, *Virtue in Civic Education*, partnered with a local volunteer prekindergarten, Winter Park Day Nursery, to see how well methods developed through a college lab school would work in a more typical pre-school (Kenyon and Doyle 2017a).

Along the way, Rollins students have worked with first- to sixth-graders at Walden Community School, Winter Park, an independent school in the

progressive tradition. Starting in 2017, the program extended into Rollins's evening program, named for Hamilton Holt, through a collaboration with the after-school program of St. Margaret Mary's Catholic School, Winter Park. In the process, we found ourselves generating a lot of lesson plans. The present volume takes the most successful of them, generated by students working closely with Kenyon and Terorde-Doyle, and shapes them into a coherent curriculum.

When the CDC moved into Hume House in 2017, Terorde-Doyle took on a new role as director. At the same time, Sharon Carnahan, professor of psychology and executive director of the Hume House CDC, joined the project, adding her voice to the interdisciplinary dialogue and overseeing an initial test drive of the curriculum in spring 2017, as a group of undergraduate interns ran lesson plans at the Hume House CDC as fast as Kenyon could write them.

Beyond Rollins, Gary Matthews provides the last thread binding this project together. While it was Matthew Lippman who started the P4C movement in 1970, Matthews advanced the cause through his work with children in the United States and abroad and through a busy publication program including *Philosophy and Young Children* (1982), *Dialogues with Children* (1984), and *The Philosophy of Childhood* (1998). As a professor of philosophy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Matthews acted as a friend and mentor to Tom Wartenberg as he set up his own P4C program at the nearby Mount Holyoke College.

Matthews was equally influential in the field of ancient and medieval philosophy. He coorganized an annual Augustine reading group, which in 2003 brought him into contact with Erik Kenyon, then a master's student at the University of Vermont (Dewey's alma mater). Matthews passed away in 2011, but the communities he built live on.

In spring 2016, Wartenberg visited Rollins to give a public talk and help guide the nascent P4C program. He remains an active adviser, collaborator, and editor of this series. As president of PLATO, the Philosophy Learning And Teaching Organization, he is currently working with Rollins's faculty to bring that group's biennial meeting to Winter Park in June 2019.

In short, the progressive movement is alive and well at Rollins today. In the spirit of collaboration, experimentation, and engaged learning, this project has involved six schools, dozens of teachers, over 140 undergraduates, and several hundred children and their caregivers.

Special thanks goes to Caitlin Strickland and Meredith Sanchez from the Hume House CDC's teaching staff; Rollins alumni Alex Earl (class of 2014) and Mollie Jones (class of 2015), who have spread the project by integrating P4C into their own teaching careers; and undergraduate interns Aleya

Barnes, Bryan Bailey, Neeraj Chatlani, Edwin Davis, Juan Diego Medrano, Jacob Riegler, Daniella Sykes, Lily Tawam, and Rachel Wasserman.

Lexi Tomkunas stands out among this group of outstanding undergraduates: In addition to serving as SGA president, she has integrated P4C into an after-school program at Fern Creek Elementary and organized a group of her peers to work as interns with Wellbourne Day Nursery, a second voluntary prekindergarten in Winter Park, as part of her senior thesis, advised by Sharon Carnahan, assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum that follows. The energy and loyalty that she and her classmates have brought to the program has been simply contagious.

We are equally grateful for our faculty colleagues. In her work on American pragmatism and the progressive movement, Lisa Ryan Musgrave is carving out a theoretical space for the P4C movement within the philosophy of education. Hoyt Edge, professor emeritus of philosophy, connected us with the Walden School, where he serves as a board member and has taken an active role in leading lessons. And Debra Wellman, professor of education, has developed community engagement courses on teaching philosophy through storybooks.

Marissa Corrente, Meredith Hein, and Micki Meyer of the Center for Leadership and Community Engagement have been a huge help over the years in both framing and developing the project. We have also been blessed to have great relationships with teachers and administrators at our neighboring schools.

Finally, and most importantly, our thanks go to all the children who have participated in this project for their insights, their honesty, and the wonderful vitality they have shared with us.

Chapter 2

A Case for Integrating Philosophy into Early Education

THE CHALLENGE: EDUCATION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

What should education for the twenty-first century look like? The first couple of decades of this century show a world of complexity and change. Problems, from the economy to the environment, are becoming increasingly global; politics is becoming ever more divisive; and new digital media have left us oversaturated with information, much of it fake. Meanwhile, advances in automation and artificial intelligence threaten to change the nature of work. As more and more routine service jobs pass to machines, human employees will be called on for creative tasks that don't follow scripts and don't fit neatly into a box.

To flourish in such a world, individuals will need to stay ahead of the curve and keep up with the times. This requires critical thinking, the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity, and a readiness to enter into constructive dialogue with people of differing perspectives.

For the most part, U.S. K–12 schools are not teaching any of these skills. Weighed down by standardized tests and unreasonable funding models, schools are rushing to make it through overfull content curricula. Students are rarely given time to form their own questions or explore their own ideas. As a result, more and more high school graduates are arriving at college ill prepared to think for themselves. There was a step forward in 2015 when Congress repealed No Child Left Behind, but the K–12 system is still a long way from freeing itself of standardized tests and bringing thinking back into the classroom on anything like a national scale.

The United States' top colleges and universities are reforming their curricula to ensure that students learn the transferable skills they need

for twenty-first-century life. The American Association of Colleges and Universities is at the forefront of this movement. In 2005, it launched a campaign called Liberal Education and America's Promise that challenges undergraduate institutions to reimagine their general education curricula around learning outcomes such as critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and information literacy (American Association of Colleges and Universities n.d.).

American pre-K schools are in a unique position to address these challenges. Relatively unburdened by standardized tests, pre-K teachers have access to an otherwise scarce resource: time. Perhaps as a result of this, they have developed their own distinctive culture of experimentation that resonates deeply with progressive, student-centered ideals.

The present curriculum aims to integrate the twenty-first-century skills, which colleges are striving for and K–12 schools are missing, into pre-K instruction. Put differently, it strives to instill a certain kind of intellectual character, to nurture and develop curiosity and questioning, and to help children practice engaging in useful dialogue with others. In short, we aim to help pre-K students learn to think.

Our lessons draw together typical elements of pre-K instruction—games, dialogical reading, and art projects—laying particular stress on developing listening and self-regulation skills. The lessons are arranged around philosophical puzzles and the ethical big ideas of figures from Socrates to modern-day feminists. In this way, the project aims to address twenty-first-century problems through a fusion of the best thinking of historic philosophers (some of them a millennia old) and best practices in current early education.

A PHILOSOPHER'S VIEW OF EARLY EDUCATION

The jump from ancient philosophy to early education is not as dramatic as it might at first appear. Plato argues at length in *Republic* that one cannot have a functioning state without the right system of early education to ensure the character development of future leaders. He spends about one-fifth of *Republic*, which is arguably his most central text, laying out what that would look like.

Plato's student Aristotle was even more systematic. His works on nature (*Physics* and *Metaphysics*) lay the groundwork for his theory of human nature (*On the Soul*), which lays the groundwork for his theory of human happiness or flourishing (*Nicomachean Ethics*). According to this grand theory, happiness is tied up in character formation. The crowning gem of Aristotle's works, *Politics*, sets out how the state should attend to the character formation of its children.

That is to say that two of the most important philosophers from antiquity, in their most important works, argue that a proper system of early education is the key to a happy, functioning state. The systems they spelled out focused on literature, music, and physical education that were meant to instill the right character traits or “virtues” in the young, mostly through habituation. Actual philosophy came later. In this respect, they both depart from Plato’s teacher, Socrates.

While Socrates never wrote down his ideas, we can gather from his students, Plato chief among them, that he spent a lot of time at the gyms of Athens, which were the main centers of both physical and literary education for the young. There he would routinely engage youth (perhaps starting with early teens) in discussions of what makes for a good life.

In short, Greece’s three most central philosophers agreed on character development as the main goal of early education and stressed its importance for the state. They disagreed, however, about what role, if any, philosophy should play in it. This brings us to an even more basic question: What is philosophy?

Bertrand Russell once said, “Science is what we know, and philosophy is what we don’t know.” While this may, in part, have been meant as a joke, it gets at a profound point: Until we sufficiently understand the world, we need people who will explore in rigorous and systematic ways what we don’t yet know. In what follows, we treat philosophy as (a) a method of rigorous inquiry (b) into questions that matter, (c) whose answers are, at least for the moment, unclear. According to this definition, philosophy is not a body of knowledge so much as a method for articulating and exploring questions.

Philosophy often proceeds by reading texts from the past; however, philosophers are not always concerned with *what* people thought but *how* they thought: how they framed questions and the different methods they used to think through theories.

The earliest philosophers explored issues that we would now think of as belonging to physics, biology, psychology, political theory, literature, and religious studies. Over time, some discussions reached sufficiently clear consensus that they *stopped* being philosophical and became new disciplines, for example, today’s “hard sciences,” which even into the nineteenth century were referred to as “natural philosophy.”

At the start of the twenty-first century, such fields as quantum physics and cognitive science are proving more complicated than we had thought. As a result, they are, at least in part, coming *back* to philosophy to provide models for making sense of a world that is stranger than our nineteenth-century predecessors ever imagined.

There is one very special set of questions that has remained a part of philosophy from the beginning: ethics. Questions of how we should live

have taken different forms over the centuries. In general terms, the ancients focused on what makes a good life, which they saw as caught up in issues of character. Modern philosophers, by contrast, were more concerned with what makes actions right or wrong.

Despite over two millennia of philosophical discussion, neither set of questions has been definitively answered. Along the way, though, we have narrowed down the most plausible options. Whatever you want to say about what makes an action right or wrong will likely boil down to talking about its consequences (J. S. Mill), the intent behind it (Immanuel Kant), or some combination of the two. Whatever you want to say about what makes someone a good person, it will likely boil down to issues of character or such virtues as justice, moderation, courage, and friendship as explored by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Each of these ideas has been explored, refined, and defended by various theorists over the centuries. Such theories provide useful frameworks, a set of possible “moves” that we might make today in thinking about issues of right and wrong. That’s not to say we are bound to only their ideas, but why start from scratch if we don’t have to?

While philosophy explores a broad range of questions, we decided to focus here on ethics for three reasons. First, four-year-olds can relate to these questions. They are constantly confronted with choices to make in situations that are still new. They have to interact with others while still working out many of the required social skills. What is fair? What does it mean to be a good friend? When should you be brave? What even is bravery? In one sense, life for a four-year-old is one big, confusing, scary, and challenging mess. This is the bread and butter of philosophy.

Exposure to ethics is also really useful. That is not to say that we are “teaching children morals.” Rather, we are helping them think through questions about the best way to live. Put another way, we are concerned with the *process*, what we might call “ethical reasoning,” not the *content* of any particular moral system, whether it be religious, political, or cultural. Our school systems have tended to confuse these two, and in an attempt to remove religious or political content, at least from the public system, we have by and large eliminated the process as well.

The final reason for teaching ethics in pre-K is one that the authors of this book did not see coming at the start: Confronting ethical questions has a way of putting teachers and students on the same level. While teachers might apply a so-called Socratic method to questions such as, Why do some rocks float but not others?, the teacher already knows the answer and is not simply saying it for pedagogical reasons. When it comes to questions such as, What is a good life?, teachers who realize the question’s difficulty will be more

willing to treat students, even as young as four years old, as peers of a sort. The result for classroom culture can be transformative.

A DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGIST'S VIEW OF PRE-K PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy has long had a place in the competitive debates of high school “ethics bowls” and in recent decades has made significant inroads into middle and even elementary school curricula through the use of storybooks. Yet, even those sympathetic to precollege philosophy have largely passed by pre-K on the grounds that philosophy’s topics are too abstract for the four-year-olds’ concrete modes of thought and its extended discussions too demanding for young attention spans. To overcome these challenges, the present project reimagines what a philosophical discussion can look like.

Drawing creatively on different modes of scaffolding (games, storybooks, art), this curriculum provides an approach to discussing abstract concepts in developmentally appropriate ways. The end result draws together many best practices within early education that are normally seen as separate. Philosophy, however, unites them into a systemic, organic whole that embraces these seemingly scattered elements and elevates them to a new level.

This approach to nurturing philosophical dialogue among young children echoes the theory of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934; *Cognition and Language*, 1999), whose work was rediscovered and popularized by Barbara Rogoff (2003) and others. Vygotsky’s premise is that children’s thinking develops in a social context, which he calls “socially shared cognition.”

Imagine a young child playing with a ball. The child interacts with the ball by throwing and dropping it, learning its weight and other properties. As the child moves to throw the ball to another person, the possibilities for learning grow exponentially. Most learning takes place in a social context. Vygotsky asks: Who buys the ball, names it, teaches the throw and catch game, and imbues it with meaning?

Imagine now the task of baking a cake, building a wall, or hammering a nail. Each task is learned in a sort of apprenticeship, as the child observes the adult or older peer, gets feedback, corrects behavior, and tries again. Vygotsky writes that children are in a decade-long *apprenticeship in thinking*, as they listen to and imitate adults who think out loud. This process happens through guided participation, explicit instruction, and informal observational learning.

In leading a philosophical discussion, teachers support and stretch the child’s thinking, instructing children on how to respond to each other in useful ways and modeling a form of asking questions for them to imitate. This

expansion of thinking skills, in addition to expanding children's vocabularies of ethical concepts, is the main goal of the present curriculum.

Millet and Tapper (2012), in a review of the benefits of philosophical inquiry in schools, place this movement solidly into a social or collaborative framework. Children are learning about not just philosophers but also how to do philosophical thinking in a social context, both following their teachers and with each other. They are also learning to think in an ethical framework as they consider questions of value that arise from daily life. Philosophy is dialogue.

Topping and Trickey (2014), in their study of the role of dialogue in philosophical education for ten-year-olds, note that, as teachers increase their use of open-ended questions and children practice responding to complex ideas through collaborative inquiry with each other, the children improve in their overall participation and in their ability to support an expressed view with reasoning.

Given how little work has been done with philosophy at the pre-K level, there is little quantitative data to look to for evidence of effectiveness. The methods presented here, however, bear a strong resemblance to interventions that address critical thinking skills through the use of teacher-child and child-child dialogue.

The Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies program, an intervention in twenty classrooms, engaged small groups of children in dialogue about books to improve their vocabularies of emotional expression and interpersonal problem solving. The effort was effective in all areas (Domitrovitch, Cortes, and Greenberg 2007).

Dialogic reading is a popular and well-known interactive technique based on the extensive research of Grover J. Whitehurst, who encourages adults to prompt children with questions and engage them in discussions while reading to them (Whitehurst et al. 1988).

The I Can Problem Solve curriculum starts at age four and can be used in families, as well as in school. It uses a series of stories and discussions to promote problem solving. At the youngest ages, this consists of teaching the definitions of terms like "is," "is not," "I can," "I can't," "truth," "lie," and so on, gradually introducing more complex words (Shure 2001). Studies show that its greatest benefit comes from teaching children the vocabulary of self-control and dialogue (Shure 2001). This is accomplished by teachers modeling the use of these concepts.

Jerome Bruner, a researcher of children's thinking, coined the term "scaffolding" to describe the sensitive structure we provide to children when we introduce ideas that require effort but are not *too* hard for the child to understand with help. This hypothetical area, from what the child can understand all alone to what the child can understand with maximum help, is called

the zone of proximal development. Bruner writes, “It is an elastic space that stretches and moves up as the child learns. The essence of great teaching is to know the child’s zone and consistently push for slightly higher performance” (Kozulin et al. 2003, 15).

Vygotsky describes the job of the parent, teacher, or older peer who comes between the object or lesson and the child as mediation. His theory is thus known as mediated learning. He describes a taxonomy of mediation that is illustrated in communal aspects of the P4C process. A mediated learning experience happens when the child is guided in thinking by someone more competent. Several curricula exist for developing mediation skills in parents and teachers, and a wealth of research indicates the benefits of a mediated learning approach (see Kozulin et al. 2003 for a review).

Vygotsky believes that it is learning that drives development, not the other way around. Those who teach with the scaffolding method find children learning far more than one would predict based on their ages. Types of mediation include the following:

- *Mediation of reciprocity* includes establishing a respectful, serve-and-return relationship between learning partners who share cultural beliefs and values. It is similar to responsive caregiving and means that the adult has to listen carefully to what the child has to say.
- *Mediation of meaning* includes sharing the meaning of the material but also the joy and excitement of learning itself. It shows the child why the event has meaning for each person. This connects the material to the child’s own worldview or experience.
- *Mediation of transcendence* takes the learning beyond the present into other places and into the past and future. The adult asks questions about what happened yesterday or what could happen tomorrow, explaining reasons for choices and plans and imagining “what if” scenarios. Don’t tell them the answers! As we bridge time and space and help children identify commonalities, we are helping them discover rules, guidelines, and truths for themselves.

As the adult stands in the gap between the experience and the child, this space becomes the sacred space of learning (Kozulin et al. 2003).

In sum, the marriage of philosophy, much of it ancient, with contemporary approaches to early education may seem implausible at first. If approached a certain way, however, the two complement each other in attractive ways. This is backed by developmental theory and research in educational best practices. Just as importantly, integrating philosophy into pre-K addresses a social need that is only becoming more pressing as time goes on: As the world becomes increasingly complex and fast-changing, our educational system must keep

up, producing individuals who can think for themselves and engage others in useful dialogue.

As the early generations of Western philosophers saw and current research reaffirms, the health of our state and the happiness of its citizens turns on the intellectual character instilled by our system of early education.

Chapter 3

Theory into Practice

Bringing Philosophy into Early Education

Tom Wartenberg laid the groundwork for our approach in his seminal book *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*. A strong proponent of a learner-centered approach, Wartenberg argues that teachers do not need previous knowledge of philosophy in order to teach it (2014, chap. 3). Rather than view teaching as a form of knowledge transfer (what he calls the teacher-centered approach), he advocates using storybooks, which often present philosophically rich puzzles as jumping-off points for children to discuss with each other.

In such a context, the teacher acts as moderator, asking rich, nonleading questions (which Wartenberg supplies) and applying a set of “philosophy rules” to steer children’s interactions with each other. This approach works wonderfully with the elementary students for whom it was devised. In the decade following its initial publication, the methods introduced in *Big Ideas* have been adopted and adapted by schools across the United States and abroad (Wartenberg 2019).

The present work distills Wartenberg’s methods in ways that work for children as young as four. This process addresses four main challenges in applying *Big Ideas*’ methods to pre-K:

1. The nine rules set out in *Big Ideas* are too complicated for four-year-olds to learn.
2. Four-year-olds tend to think in concrete terms. Asking them to have abstract discussions about storybooks can overtax their cognitive abilities.
3. The normal shape of *Big Ideas*’ lessons relies on filling out charts, which Wartenberg calls story frameworks, but typical four-year-olds cannot read well enough for this.

4. Most four-year-olds cannot sit still long enough to have the rich discussions Wartenberg's open-ended questions invite.

The method developed here meets each of these challenges by adapting Wartenberg's methods in ways appropriate for younger children:

1. The nine philosophy rules are distilled to three—we listen, we think, we respond—and taught through a series of games.
2. Teachers encourage children to “think with their bodies” by prefacing storybooks with games that focus children on the salient features of those stories while also providing opportunities to practice the philosophy rules.
3. While Wartenberg calls on teachers to read and then lead children through a story framework, the present method combines the two in a form of dialogical reading.
4. Rather than have children sit still and talk, teachers use art projects to scaffold discussion of open-ended questions, encouraging children to engage with each other while they create art.

These more embodied approaches, discussed here, were developed with pre-K students in mind. In partnering with various schools, however, classes at Rollins found that the same methods work just as well through about third grade. After a certain age (maybe fourth grade), the art projects that are meant to scaffold discussion tend to distract from it.

The authors claim no hard division of ages along developmental lines. Rather, they present their methods as an expansion of Wartenberg's more text-based approach, to be adopted, adapted, or dispensed with according to the developmental level of the students involved.

THE PHILOSOPHY RULES¹

As with all early education, initial structure largely determines the quality of the experience for both children and adults. Rules give boundaries for behavior, set expectations for involvement, and ultimately provide the framework for discussions to evolve. Following Wartenberg, we approach philosophical discussions as analogous to a game governed by rules. Building on Wartenberg, however, we not only tell children these rules but also provide multiple opportunities to practice them through a combination of games, gestures, and verbal reminders.

Rule 1: We listen. We symbolized this rule visually by moving a hand to an ear. In teaching it, we asked the children when they listen, how they listen,

and why they listen. Some typical responses have been, “When others are talking,” “With our ears,” “So we can be safe.”

Recognizing that merely stating the rule was not enough for our purposes, we set out to practice listening skills with a series of activities. In one, the children listened to the sounds of musical instruments from behind a shield, and we asked the children to identify the object that produced the sound. In another, we stopped the children spontaneously throughout the day to be quiet and listen to the everyday sounds of rooms, of the playground, of the time of day. You can imagine the awareness these listening games brought to the children’s experiences: They heard the humming of lights, the chirping of birds, and the squeaking of doorknobs in other rooms.

The game Telephone became a staple, as each child was told a word and asked to pass it on to a neighbor in a circle. The game brought laughter and silliness as children whispered into each other’s ears. The game itself, while fun and interactive, showed us that perhaps children needed to play with the concept of philosophy before actually philosophizing. Over time, however, the skill took root. Children got better at listening to each other. At the same time, adults got better at actually listening to children as we helped them articulate their own ideas.

New research into how children develop self-control and self-regulation skills has renewed interest in playing these age-old games (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child 2011). In playing Simon Says, we can talk with children about turn taking, waiting for a turn, working memory, having power, exerting power, and following directions. In Red Light, Green Light, we practice skills of not only listening but also body control; we try regulating our responses when we have to go back to the beginning, and we practice being the one in control when acting as the light keeper.

Rule 2: We think. We symbolized this rule visually by placing a finger to our temple and displaying an expression of deep thought. While easy to represent, the thinking rule required children to engage in a level of self-reflective thinking about thinking. The conversation about how we think was key in supporting children’s learning of this rule. We planned ways to connect their understanding of thinking to moments when we saw them actively thinking, and we verbalized for them how their understanding was evolving. We asked the children to show us what thinking looked like. We asked, “How do we know if you are thinking?”

We also began asking a series of open-ended questions at those points in the day when all students met as a single group. This became the time when we intentionally planned thinking games, just as we had planned listening games. Open-ended questions are often heard in high-quality preschool environments, and this was no different. However, we made the question

interesting to individual children by eliciting different perspectives or likes and dislikes.

The “question of the day” was born. Each day children were greeted with a simple two- or three-choice question that allowed each to consider their thoughts and then draw a conclusion. This could be as simple as “Are you a boy or a girl?” or as opaque as “Would you rather be a shark or a dolphin?” More opaque questions encouraged children to think more about their ideas and reflect on their answers. At one point, the children began to choose the answers that their friends chose, so they would “not lose” or feel different, but when teachers focused attention on the children who decided independently, the phenomenon quickly dissipated.

While the question of the day certainly affected our program, the answers we heard helped us see that children think very deeply about many topics. It only took some purposeful questioning and room for discussion for children to express that thinking. One day, children encountered a group of snails on the playground and took an interest in the snails, pondering how and what they eat and so on. For our next question of the day, we asked the children where they might live if they were snails. Their answers were thoughtful and mindful of a child’s reality, but the game practiced the essential skills of listening, thinking, and then sharing their ideas.

Rule 3: We respond. The final rule connected easily with the question of the day routine, but it also required some specific focused activity to help the children understand how to respond appropriately and recognize that responses need to relate to the question posed, not just express whatever they might feel like talking about next. We thus provided verbal scaffolding, a “lingo” for useful responses, by saying, “Allison, do you agree or disagree with Jamail? Say why.” We symbolized this rule by pointing to our mouths and then to the person we wanted the child to respond to.

We often had to repeat our question so children listened, comprehended, and then answered. Such interactions made it clear how individual children’s developmental stages affected their participation in the philosophy games we planned. We thus reviewed children’s responses to questions in a large group and reflect on their answers, giving them a chance to experience the dialogue dynamic we ultimately want to create.

To practice responding, we developed the river game. Children were posed a series of questions, such as, “Would you rather bring water or a toy car on our lion hunt?” and then, depending on their answer, they are asked to stand on one side or the other of a river painted on the floor. We then asked children *why* they took the stand they did. We prompted them to speak across the divide, using the phrase “I disagree with you because . . .” We played the river game when we wanted children to consider two choices or perspectives and choose which they personally agreed or disagreed with.

The game helped them identify their initial thoughts about a particular idea and—with a bit of prompting—not simply think as their friends do. This game had the greatest impact when children realized they could have a different opinion than their friends. The river game placed a spotlight on each child's comprehension and reflective skills. For the teachers, this game presented the challenge of once again trying not to influence the outcome for children while also making the possibilities clear for them to consider.

Vygotsky theorizes that it is through social interactions that children learn and gain cognitive skill. In his terms, the river game is an instance of mediated learning and mediation of meaning that prompts children to think differently than their friends, consider alternative choices, and come up with other ideas.

The philosophy rules, once they have become ingrained, set the stage for rich confusion, disagreements, and wonderments to bubble up in our daily conversations, weaving a kind of philosophical dialogue into the fabric of our school culture. In time, they have brought a culture shift in our routines and our own thinking about what children can manage and comprehend. We refer visually to the rules when children are distracted or excited by others in the group. And we review these rules at group times, at snack time, and throughout the day to reinforce the children's awareness of the rules of engagement.

FRAMING QUESTIONS AND PHILOSOPHICAL PUZZLES

Philosophical Puzzles: In one sense, the whole point of engaging children in discussions of ethical questions is to practice the philosophy rules. While this might not sound very exciting, these particular rules—listen, think, respond—have the power to transform school culture and the way children interact with peers and adults alike. For this to take off, though, we have to get children disagreeing with each other. In our experience, this aspect of the project was the hardest for teachers to adapt to.

Teachers often assume that getting everyone on the same page is fundamental to classroom management. When conflict comes up, most teachers seem hardwired to seek a consensus or, at the very least, get children “to agree to disagree.” Philosophy actively *encourages* disagreement between children. How could there be such a fundamental difference in approaches to classroom management? To understand this, we should note that philosophy is interested in cultivating disagreements of a certain sort. The key is the question or issue that children are disagreeing about. These can be grouped into three categories:

1. *Absolutist questions*: A question of this sort has a single, clear, widely agreed-on answer. Why do some rocks float but not others? Which side of the road do people drive on in the United Kingdom? Why does the sun rise and set at different times throughout the year? As Bertrand Russell said, philosophy is “what we don’t know.” Philosophers are generally uninterested in absolutist questions, as they don’t tend to spark the right kind of dialogue.

At worst, absolutist questions lead groups into fishing trips, where the teacher knows the right answer and is simply waiting for a student to give it. At best, such questions can encourage children to find answers for themselves. In these cases, though, it’s not clear that what they are doing is *philosophy*. What’s more, there are enough questions that don’t have clear answers, so philosophers are generally uninterested in creating controversies over those questions that do.²

2. *Relativist questions*: These are at the opposite end of the spectrum, where there are as many “right” answers as there are people or groups with opinions. What is the best flavor of ice cream? Whatever one you like is the best for you! Which are better: dogs or cats? Again, it’s up to you. Relativism generally crops up when people start out thinking in absolutist terms, confront people with different opinions, and then throw up their hands, saying, “It’s all a matter of perspective!”

At their best, relativist questions provide an opportunity to see things from other perspectives and help individuals feel empowered to have and express their own ideas. While these are both important, such conversations often cannot progress beyond a kind of show and tell. If you find out that someone prefers chocolate ice cream and you respond that you like strawberry, where else is there to go? There seems little point in trying to get someone to change his or her preferences, since that’s all we’re really talking about: preferences.

In terms of encouraging disagreement, our curriculum sometimes uses relativist questions not to spark philosophical discussions but to play with the idea of philosophy by practicing some of the skills that go into it. This can be particularly useful at the start of a philosophy project. For actual philosophical discussions, we must look to our third type of questions.

3. *Pluralist questions/puzzles*: A pluralist question walks the middle road. Unlike an absolutist question, it has no one, clearly agreed-on answer. Yet, unlike a relativist question, it is not just a matter of preference and thus does not fall into an “anything goes” mentality. What responsibility do Americans have toward cultures that do not give equal rights to women? We cannot simply impose our values on other cultures, but we also cannot ignore human rights violations just because they take place somewhere

else. The question is timely and pressing. Its answer is also far from obvious.

Pluralist questions are the bread and butter of philosophy. Greek philosophers spoke in terms of *aporia*. The word literally means “to be at a dead end.” In practice, this meant either (a) perplexity or (b) puzzle. Many of Plato’s dialogues depict his teacher Socrates questioning supposed experts until everyone is “perplexed” and the work ends. Aristotle, by contrast, tends to start with a puzzle and proceeds to work through it as a way of setting out his own view.

According to our own definition, philosophical questions are those “whose answers are, *at least for the moment*, unclear.”³ Disputes over the basic components of the natural world, which once seemed intractable, have reached points of consensus over time. Can basic questions in ethics ever be definitively answered, or will they always be matters of dispute? Who knows! Whether definitive answers are forthcoming or not, we all have lives to get through and a world to run together.

From a practical perspective, if nothing else, we can all benefit by engaging with pluralist questions, as they allow us to clarify issues, generate viable options, and engage with others, even if we do not totally share their views. These are the skills, developed through philosophy, that will serve individuals well in twenty-first-century life.

In short, it is important to ask the right kind of questions. Both relativist and pluralist questions can, in more colloquial terms, be described as “open-ended.” When it comes to philosophy, pluralist questions are our ultimate focus. We want questions that children will find interesting, those that will allow them to take positions, give reasons, and engage with each other in discussions that make progress. Such questions will provide ample opportunities for practicing the philosophy rules.

The lesson plans that follow mine the history of philosophy for aporetic gems, questions that have perplexed the world’s best minds, from Socrates to contemporary feminists: What is a well-lived life? What makes someone a friend? What makes an action right or wrong? What is our responsibility to others?

Teachers tend to find it odd, at first, to engage very young children in such profound yet open-ended discussions. Once they’ve gotten a feel for it, though, these same teachers find such questions cropping up constantly, as disputes over who gets a turn on a swing, for example, provide the chance for a discussion of fairness (see [Table 3.1](#)).

This scheme of absolutist/relativist/pluralist questions can be applied to any topic from astronomy to zoology. For the present, we focus on ethics. But what makes something an “ethical” question? As a rough pass, we can

Table 3.1: Question Types

Type of Question	Number of Viable Answers	Prompts What Kind of Discussion	Example
Absolutist	One	Fishing trip	Why do some rocks float?
Relativist	Anything goes	Show and tell	What's the best flavor of ice cream?
Pluralist	More than one but not anything goes	Philosophical dialogue	What makes someone a friend?

distinguish between normative and descriptive terms. Descriptive terms simply describe the way things are. These are the typical domain of the sciences. Normative terms, by contrast, make some kind of value claim.

Descriptive and normative terms give two different ways of approaching matters. Some cultures, for instance, practice infanticide. An anthropologist might *describe* these practices at length and even report on what people in these cultures think about those practices. All of this is descriptive. But the moment we start passing judgment on whether people in these cultures *ought* to engage in such practices, we have crossed the line into normative talk. So: “Certain cultures practice infanticide” (descriptive) versus “Certain cultures ought to practice infanticide” or “No culture ought to practice infanticide” (normative).

In studying ethics, our focus is on normative questions. That isn’t to say that descriptive matters are irrelevant; it might matter, for instance, what resources are available in given cultures, what the consequences of *not* exposing infants would be, and so on. All these are descriptive questions. Yet, for an ethicist, they are merely steps along the way to wrestling with normative questions.

Within the class of ethical concerns, there is a general distinction between questions of good and bad character and questions of right and wrong action. You can typically spot these by the terms used:

Character: happiness, well-being, thriving, flourishing, virtue, vice, brave, friend, fair (person), moderate (person), good/bad (person)

Action: right, wrong, consequences, intent, caring, fair (action)

In general, this distinction tends to map onto ancient ethics (which is focused on character) and modern ethics (which is focused on actions). The lines, of course, blur: A fair person will tend to perform fair acts, for example. The more important point, for our purposes, is to keep an eye on the normative/

descriptive distinction, as our ultimate goal is to focus children onto normative questions, whichever way we spell them out.

THINKING WITH OUR BODIES

Games/Activities: The final piece of our curriculum is to engage children with philosophical puzzles in developmentally appropriate ways. To this end, our curriculum lays out a series of lesson plans involving games, stories, and art projects that provide rich opportunities for children to take sides, disagree, and puzzle through ideas together. These lessons meet children at their developmental level and invite them to “think with their bodies” about ideas that are normally thought of as too abstract for their age group.

We augment Wartenberg’s storybook approach by introducing our stories’ big ideas through games and activities. For instance, as preparation for discussing moderation in the *Frog and Toad* story “Cookies,” we have children mix paints. While they are occupied in this very hands-on activity, teachers ask, “Is this *too much* blue? Is this *not enough* yellow? Is this green *just right*?” By the time we turn to the story, the children have a working vocabulary of excess, deficiency, and moderation. These opening games and activities serve to focus children on philosophically relevant issues before we start reading stories.

While we do not dictate to children *what* to think, we advance conversations by directing what children think *about*. A dialogical reading of “Cookies,” for instance, could engage children in any number of discussions: Frog and Toad’s friendship, sharing, children’s favorite cookie flavors. By prefacing the reading with our paint-mixing activity, we focus children on questions of moderation and excess. We leave it to children, however, to decide among themselves where to draw the line.

These games and activities serve the additional purpose of reinforcing the philosophy rules. In mixing paint, the teacher may ask what color a child wants to add and then remind her to “think” before she answers. The game Telephone, in addition to practicing listening, provides a jumping-off point for thinking about the difference between outcome and intent.

Each lesson that follows sets out three or four lesson arcs comprising a game/activity, story, and art project. We have arranged these in such a way that all three philosophy rules are reinforced through the games/activities of each lesson.⁴ While going through these, we recommend both verbal reinforcement (saying “listen,” “think,” “respond”) and visual reinforcement (pointing to one’s ear, temple, and mouth).

Games also provide an initial roadmap for steering the discussions within each lesson. As we observe how children behave and we listen to their ideas

through the games, we begin to identify their thoughts and help them clarify their understanding. Eventually, we also help them to see new perspectives offered by their peers. Different children relate differently to the topics and the books from which we draw philosophical puzzles, but ultimately the experiences nurture their thoughts.

Stories: Dialogic reading is well established in early education circles (Whitehurst et al. 1988). Teachers stop midstory to ask questions and engage children in a series of mini discussions. What philosophy brings is a new set of questions to ask. Rather than testing children's comprehension of the story or taking the opportunity to quiz them on color recognition or counting skills, we provide questions to spark discussions of philosophical puzzles.

In "Dragons and Giants" by Arnold Lobel, when Frog and Toad run away from an avalanche, a teacher may pause to ask children whether these characters were being brave. Some might say, "No, because they are running away." Others may disagree, since it would be foolish *not* to run away from an avalanche. This disagreement may lead to exploring the relationship of bravery to foolishness, the question of whether one may be brave while feeling fear while running away, and so on. There is no set direction that discussions must take or "moral of the story" that we are looking to teach. The discussion is the point.

For each story, a set of questions is provided as *the sort of thing you might ask*. If you skip some, that's fine. If you change them, that's fine. If you add new ones, that's fine. Our questions provide a starting point. The learner-centered approach advocated here calls on teachers to stay in tune with their students' interests, experiences, and concerns. Please improvise! And in the process, we encourage you to reflect on the *kinds* of questions you are asking: Are you going on fishing trips? Are you encouraging show and tell? Are you posing questions that may lead to fruitful philosophical discussion among the children?

Art Projects: Rollins's Hume House Child Development and Student Resource Center, the lab school through which the present curriculum was developed, itself employs a curriculum for art and learning inspired by Reggio Emilia. In the Reggio tradition, standard practice at the Hume House CDC fuses together many theorists, including Piaget, Vygotsky, Malaguzzi, and Bruner.

Malaguzzi might propose that children are like travelers seeking understanding and meaning in objects, materials, and relationships throughout all their experiences. As such, they are active subjects who are born with big potentials. Teachers act as anthropologists in their interactions with children, seeking to understand children's ideas and to help them develop their potential.

At the Hume House CDC, art is approached as both a process and a documentation of learning. Art is an authentic extension of the artist: It expresses our understanding and thoughts placed strategically and purposefully on paper or molded into clay. It is through art that children often propose relationships and their own theories of meaning as they develop their own interpretations and understandings through objects. Children develop a dialogue with things. In that sense, there is an element of surprise in learning about life.

As early childhood educators, we value the process over the product of the art. Still, it is fair to say that children must have some skill with art tools before they can produce a meaningful artifact and have a thoughtful description of their work. Four-year-old children are at a unique developmental juncture, where their art becomes more representational and they begin to write letters and to have specific ideas of how to create self-portraits, paintings, shapes, and the like. This jives well with our plans for philosophy activities.

In encouraging children to start a dialogue with things in art, we are also building up their capacity for dialogue with each other. As teachers ask questions during the art projects, they model the dialogue we seek to foster with children. Art projects call on children to represent themselves engaged in different scenarios: being brave, being a good friend, and so on. Other activities ask the children to create structures with Legos or blocks or to complete collages with friends. All these activities give children time to reflect on a question. Such reflections allow them to unleash their creative ideas and develop more thoughtful conversations.

Art becomes a conduit for children's thoughts. What they actually verbalize or narrate about their work becomes an artifact of their thinking. The focus is not on the production of realistic art but on the reflective moment it opens for the child. One child narrated his drawing of friends: "We are playing with dinosaurs. Luke and me are friends." In the care lesson, another child stated, "When I take care of Ariel and my little sister, I feel 'I love you' in my heart." This signals a profound understanding of what it means to "take care" of someone and sets forth a four-year-old child's innermost feelings and thoughts about what it means.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Legend has it that Theseus, prince of Athens, sailed to Crete, where he vanquished the Minotaur before returning home in triumph. The ancient Athenians held onto the ship as a part of their cultural heritage. Pieces of it, of course, had to be replaced as years, decades, and centuries rolled past. Eventually, it became a joke among philosophers: Is "the ship of Theseus" parked in the harbor really the same ship Theseus sailed if at this point none

of its original components remain? Philosophers still love to puzzle through the issues this question raises; after all, if your body replaces all its cells every seven years, are you the same person you were seven years ago?

On a more practical note, we recommend treating this book like the ship of Theseus: Replace, rearrange, and develop as you see fit! The games, questions, and art projects that follow are not written in stone but are a place to start. For the learner-centered approach advocated here, it is crucial that you adapt lessons to the interests and abilities of the children you are working with. You know these children. We do not. So, as Tom Wartenberg puts it, “Please steal these ideas!” but do not feel beholden to every last detail. That said, there are a few structural considerations that you should take into account.

Multiple Touches: In working with pre-K children, we’ve had the best results looking at each big idea from two to four slightly different but related angles. Each lesson is structured around a single big idea and consists of the following:

- A philosophical overview for teachers of the chapter’s big idea
- A set of questions to frame teachers’ discussion of that big idea
- A developmental psychologist’s perspective on the chapter’s big idea and how children will relate to it
- A reflection from the Hume House CDC teachers on using these materials with children, in particular those roadblocks and insights that no one saw coming
- Two to four lesson arcs to be used with children

Some children get it faster than others. If you are working with slightly older students, your own curriculum might benefit from leaving out certain lessons and moving more quickly. If your children need more lessons, we have hardly exhausted the possibilities here. Once teachers get some experience of the lessons laid out here, they see possibilities all around. We use three picture books to consider bravery. A room of experienced pre-K teachers could easily name another dozen. Use your knowledge of your children to get the pacing right for them.

Spacing Activities: The lessons presented here were first developed by undergraduates working in a multicourse community engagement effort. Logistical constraints often forced us to get through each lesson arc—that is, each game, story, and art project—in a single sitting. This could be taxing at times. As our teaching staff at the Hume House CDC adopted the curriculum into their own practice, the first thing they did was break these up and spread them across the day or even over several days.

When presented with new ideas and new ways of thinking, very young students are like slow cookers: While we need to keep challenging them, there is always more going on under the surface than we can see. When we respect that and give children time to think, we are amazed at what they can do. Teachers, meanwhile, will need some time to get used to new content and new ways of doing things.

This curriculum provides fodder for a book study or teacher development program. In an ideal setting, teachers would come together every week or two to discuss the philosophical ideas in a lesson and then weave its lesson arcs into the plans for the coming week(s). Philosophy is all about discussion. By taking one lesson at a time, teachers and students alike may get the knack for new ideas and new ways of doing things.

Practicing the Rules: Each lesson that follows is arranged so the games introducing the stories also allow children to practice the philosophy rules: We listen, we think, we respond. While we found this efficient, it is not the only way to go. If you change the activities around, we merely ask that you make sure that children get the chance to practice the rules *at some point* until they work their way into your school's culture.

It's not about the art!: As Nancy Hertzog (2001) explains of Reggio Emilia, we are not teaching children art; we are teaching children *through* art as a scaffold for discussing philosophical ideas. It doesn't matter what the art looks like. When working with older children (maybe around third or fourth grade) who can sit still longer to discuss ideas, the art may actually become a hindrance. As with any scaffold, use it as long as it's useful, and then set it aside.

Opening games, likewise, were developed for young children to focus their embodied ways of thinking on various issues before reading stories. Some children (starting around first or second grade) can jump straight into a story. In these cases, feel free to forego the introductory games. It is the storybooks that are the heart of each lesson. Even these, though, can be swapped out for other books, shortened, or skipped entirely. All three of these—games, story, art—provide springboards and frameworks for discussions, but it's the discussions that matter.

Likewise for the questions provided to accompany games, stories, and art projects: These are examples of the *kinds* of questions that you may ask to spark discussion. You need not use all of them in particular, provided you are asking *some* questions of a sort that will spark the right kind of discussion. We are merely providing something for you to start with, a curricular ship of Theseus. Improvise away!

Content/Structure: The two parts of this book explore ancient and modern ethics. [Part I](#) draws mostly from Aristotle and his theory of virtue. Lesson 1 sets out the foundation, beginning with particular “characters” in stories and

moving to thinking about someone's "character" in general. The next two lessons explore particular virtues or, in child-friendly terms, "kinds of character": bravery (Lesson 2) and moderation/self-control (Lesson 3). Lesson 4 provides a capstone exploring issues of friendship, which for Aristotle is intimately connected to issues of personal character.

Part II explores what makes particular actions right or wrong. Lesson 5 sets out J. S. Mill's theory that acts are good insofar as they contribute to the general happiness of people overall. This "consequentialist" theory states that it is an action's result or consequence that matters. Lesson 6 contrasts this with Immanuel Kant's "nonconsequentialist" theory, which states that it is a person's intent that makes an action right or wrong. In recent decades, some have found the theories of both Mill and Kant to be strangely impersonal. Lesson 7, therefore, sets out "care ethics" as developed by more recent feminists, building on the work of Carol Gilligan.

In our work at Rollins, we've found that young children have an easier time relating to questions of character, while adults (whether undergraduates or teachers) have an easier time relating to questions of right or wrong actions. The present order of lessons is what we've found works best for children. You may, however, switch the order of **Parts I** and **II** or simply leave one or the other of them out. Given that Aristotle's account of friendship builds on his account of character, Lesson 4 makes little sense without Lessons 1–3. Likewise, since Lesson 6 sets Kant against Mill, it should not be used without first working through Lesson 5.

What's Left? If the broad structure and every last part of this curriculum may be changed, what are we left with in the end? Whatever you make of it! This book is the product of a multiyear collaboration between six schools, multiple teachers, dozens of undergraduates, and hundreds of children. It has been a creative project proceeding through trial and a whole lot of error. Every time we repeat a lesson, children get something different out of it. We hope that what follows will provide a spark to ignite yet more creativity in your schools and further the discussion of philosophy among the very young.

NOTES

1. Much of what follows is taken from Kenyon and Doyle 2017a. The passage on the philosophy rules also appears in Kenyon and Doyle 2017b.

2. The major exception would be cases when a consensus has been reached too quickly. There are many instances where "common sense" really represents out-of-date theory or cultural bias. Throughout history, philosophers have questioned the rationale behind slavery, the subjugation of women, and more. In these instances, though, these philosophers are raising questions *as though* their answers were

not settled. In other words, they are looking to turn absolutist questions into something else.

3. Questions about the possibility of knowledge were at the heart of Hellenistic philosophy. According to Sextus Empiricus, a Pyrrhonian skeptic, there were three types of philosophers: (a) dogmatists, who believed that they had found the truth; (b) academics (a rival skeptical school to Sextus's own), who thought the truth could not be found; and (c) skeptics (literally "seekers"), who were still searching for the truth. From the outside, it is easy to confuse (b) and (c). In this book, we take the final approach, (c), and simply do not take a position on whether ethical questions can be definitely answered. Sextus, PH 1.1–4.

4. They do not necessarily come in the order listen, think, respond. The philosophical themes of the storybook, rather, dictate the nature of the games that introduce them.

Part II

TEACHING ANCIENT ETHICS

Tradition holds Thales of Miletus to be the first philosopher of the West. Writing in the early sixth century BCE, he famously theorized that everything is made of water. While none of his actual writing comes down to us, we can piece together from later authors (Aristotle first and foremost) that Thales's main project was to explain the world around him in material terms. In this he departs from such earlier authors as Homer and Hesiod, who looked to gods and myths to explain the way the world works.

Thales created quite a trend. In a few years, competing theories abounded, claiming that the world was made of air (Anaximenes), fire (Heraclitus), four elements (Empedocles), and “the limitless” (Anaximander). By the end of the fifth century BCE, these debates had progressed into Democritus's surprisingly modern-sounding theory that everything is composed of atoms that form compounds as they come together and separate, moving through the void.

Born in the middle of the fifth century, Socrates encountered this debate and all its competing ideas as he grew up in the Athenian democracy. While he seems not to have had much of a head for physics, or “natural philosophy” as it came to be called, the spirit of inquiry, innovation, and free debate opened the door for him to pursue a new question: How ought we to live? Everyone you will ever meet has a life. And most people, if pressed, will admit that they want to make the most of that life. Yet, how many of us actively and critically reflect on what that would actually look like?

Socrates's contribution to philosophy was to throw into question assumptions, even those sanctified by age, tradition, and religion, and to show that being our best selves is not as straightforward as it might initially appear. In general terms, he posed a bunch of questions but didn't answer any of them. He did, however, frame the discussion in terms of the attempt

to *define* various ethical terms, first and foremost such “virtues” as bravery, moderation, justice, and friendship.

The Greek term for “virtue,” *arete*, literally means “excellence.” We can, for instance, say that the virtue of a knife is that it cuts well. Such a knife is leading the best life available to a knife. The typical Athenian on the street would probably point to an Olympic victor as an example of human *arete*. In philosophers’ hands, the idea of virtue does not mean “being a good person” so much as “being good at being human.” Virtuous people lead the fullest lives available to them. More colloquially, they have their ducks in a row. While that sounds good in a general way, things get tricky when we try to pin down exactly what this means.

When Socrates looks for “definitions,” he focuses not on words but on the realities to which they refer. Any competent English speaker can say what the word “water” means, but to get at the heart of what the stuff out in the physical world really is takes knowledge of chemistry and the ability to explain the properties of H₂O. Likewise, anyone reading this sentence can explain what the words “bravery,” “moderation,” or “friend” mean. But to offer a formal definition that will cover all instances of bravery, moderation, and friendship (the traits out in the human world) takes something more than familiarity with the English language.

Socrates’s inquiries made him many friends, particularly among the young and somewhat rebellious citizens of Athens. It also made him enemies, particularly among the city’s leaders, who could not defend themselves against his rigorous questions. Socrates was eventually tried and executed for “impiety and corrupting the city’s youth.” But the attempt to silence his questioning backfired. Socrates became a martyr for philosophy, and his students founded schools that transformed Athens into the first college town. Chief among them was Plato, who set up a school in one of the city’s gyms, “the Academy,” from which our own word derives.

Rather than write in his own voice, Plato composed dozens of dialogues depicting Socrates engaged in discussions with various people. Some of these present Socrates’s own mode of philosophy: questioning others until everyone, Socrates included, is left in perplexity. In others, Plato uses Socrates as a mouthpiece to present his own ideas. In this, Plato gives his own answers to the questions his teacher posed.

Plato’s star pupil, Aristotle, expanded this philosophical project, setting up shop in another gym, “the Lyceum,” from which the French draw their term for “high school.” From this spot, he gave yet another set of answers to Socrates’s questions. In the process, Aristotle builds on and critiques Plato’s ideas. The result of all this is a rich conversation on what it means to live the best life, to be our best selves.

While this might all be interesting from a historical perspective, the real reason we start with the Greeks is that their ideas about living well have, for the most part, never been superseded. At least within Western thought, medieval thinkers tended to build on the Greeks and adapt their ideas to the needs of the Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In more recent centuries, discussions of ethics have moved away from questions of living well and toward what makes actions right or wrong.

Over the last few decades, questions of living well have come back into fashion. This shift in interest has actually brought Aristotle back into fashion. Philosophers today have looked to his virtue ethics as a framework for contextualizing more recent debates about what constitutes right action. And while the field of positive psychology is still quite new, researchers are busy gathering empirical data that is showing that the ancients were really onto something with their ideas about what happiness amounts to.

None of this is to say that Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle were *right* but simply that they have proven *useful* all these centuries later. We thus use their ideas, Aristotle's most of all, to frame our discussions of what it means to be good at being human.

Chapter 4

Lesson 1: Character

ARISTOTLE ON CHARACTER¹

What do you want people to say about you at your funeral? While the question may seem morbid, it clarifies what actually matters in life.

While we may spend our days making car payments, fussing with our profile pics, and saving up for vacations, how many of us want to be remembered for what we drive, how many likes we got, or how much fun we had at the beach? These things have a value, but they set the bar too low when it comes to taking stock of a life. The trouble is that they don't get at *who* we are but instead focus on what we own (car), what we consume (vacation), or what people think of us (likes). Shouldn't we be more concerned with who we are and what we create? Aristotle thought so. According to him, the first step to a life well lived is to develop the right kind of character.

This begs the question: Who gets to decide what the “right” kind of character is? Different cultures propose different virtues: Americans value independence; the Chinese value community. One country's freedom fighter is another country's terrorist. Even within the United States, what conservative circles see as “family values” strike the LGBTQ community as oppressive. With so many clashing perspectives, it is easy to feel lost at sea. Like it or not, though, we need to take some position on these matters. This is particularly true for parents and teachers, who are responsible for shaping the character of future generations. But where do we even start?

From a formal perspective, there are three basic ways to deal with conflicts among values.² First, we could simply pick one position, be it cultural, religious, or whatever; dig in our heels; and declare it the right one. Let's call this “absolutism.” This is likely to make many of us nervous, though. After

all, who am I to dictate the truth to people with wildly different experiences from my own?

We may thus be attracted to a second option, which is to say that each culture or group is right for itself. Americans should be independent, the Chinese should be communal, and so on. Let's call this "relativism." While it avoids some of the troubles of absolutism, it does so at a price, as it tells us that cultures that practice slavery, raise child soldiers, and perpetuate sexism *ought* to do all these things. With this we have merely swung from one unattractive extreme to another.

What we need is to find a middle way, a position that would allow for some cultural difference without falling into an "anything goes" mentality. Let's call this "pluralism." While this may seem attractive, it leaves us with yet another question: What nonarbitrary guidance can we use to help us find this middle path?

Aristotle grounds such an attempt in human nature. His idea is that certain activities are characteristic of human life and that we have attained good character when we come to perform those characteristic activities well. The Greeks grouped these good character traits under the term "virtue" (*arete*) or, more literally, "excellence." The idea is easiest to see if we start with artifacts that were built for clear purposes. It is characteristic of a dry-erase marker, for instance, to write on dry-erase boards. Writing well is a virtue of a marker. A marker that does not write well is not living the fullest "life" available to it, given the kind of thing it is.

While Aristotle does not think that anyone created plants and animals, he still thinks that they have characteristic activities that determine the character traits that count as virtues for them. Life for a plant consists of activities of nutrition, growth, and reproduction. A plant that carries out these functions well is living a full life *for a plant*. Whatever your views on creation, a plant with full foliage and ample fruit is flourishing more than one that is dried out and browning.

Life for nonhuman animals embraces a plant's same activities of nutrition, growth, and reproduction but in ways that are tangled up in perception, memory, and motion. While standing around waiting for food and casting one's seeds to the wind may be a good life for a tree, it would be quite a sad life for a dog. This more complicated life-form senses and pursues its food; likewise for mates. A dog that is overfed, antisocial, and lazy is not living a full life for a dog. A dog's virtues include swiftness, activity, and the social bonds of a pack animal.

Life for a human being, finally, includes all of the above but in ways that are caught up with reasoning. We neither stand waiting for food to come to us nor simply chase after it when we smell it. Rather, we eat at set times, cooking and organizing meals in complex ways. Likewise for reproduction, we neither

cast our seed to the wind nor simply chase a mate when we see one. We engage in complex dating rituals, perhaps involving meals and thinking about long-term questions of personality and life goals alongside our more basic urges simply to bond or reproduce.

Human nature, according to Aristotle, ends up being a sort of layer cake: Each of us has an inner plant, an inner animal, and an inner human. We might think these characteristic activities are the result of evolution or a Creator God; we might think that they have simply always been there. (Aristotle defends the last option.) Whichever theory we prefer, Aristotle carves out human nature at such a general level of description that most of us should be all right going along with it.

But how does Aristotle's account of human nature help us determine what human virtue is? It sounds great to say that we should be rational, but what does that mean in practice? Aristotle gives two different, perhaps conflicting, answers.

One is that human virtue consists of performing only our highest function well (i.e., reasoning). According to this view, the fullest human life is one of "study" (*theoria*), in which our days are occupied with purely theoretical undertakings in higher sciences, philosophy, and math. While we still may need to eat and interact with other people occasionally, these activities have no value in themselves; they are merely means to our one valuable activity: study. Aristotle himself seems to doubt the practicality of this plan.³

His other answer to the question of human virtue, the one to which he devotes the bulk of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, is that living well consists of performing the full range of human activities well. Given the competing demands of our inner plant, inner animal, and inner human, this ends up being something of a balancing act. Since we can't do much about autonomic processes of nutrition and growth, Aristotle focuses on how our inner animal and human interact.

Aristotle takes these images seriously: Just as an actual human being may train an actual animal, our inner human may train our inner animal. In this scheme, we use reason to figure out what would be best for the human organism overall: How much food is neither too much nor too little; what dangers are worth confronting and which aren't? Once we have "the mean" figured out, we then train our inner animals (i.e., our desires) to desire this mean. A person who has been trained in this way, Aristotle concludes, will act well in whatever situation arises, walking the line between too little and too much.

This is easiest to see in the virtue of moderation, which Aristotle takes to be the proper attitude toward food, drink, and sex (see Lesson 2). Yet, he thinks this middle way shows us the heart of "bravery" (Lesson 3) and other virtues, as well. A person who lives by such virtues, according to Aristotle, is living

a full human life. This is the kind of character and the kind of action that we would want to be remembered for.

Still, we may worry that Aristotle has avoided relativism based on cultural differences at the cost of falling into absolutism based on human biology. This is particularly problematic in those cases when ideas that are actually cultural get passed off as biological fact: that black people are less rational than white ones, that women should be subservient to men, that sex is for procreation and thus homosexuality is unnatural. Aristotle himself claimed that some people were “natural slaves”⁴ and argued that, when male “seed” met imperfect female “soil,” the male form would sometimes not fully take, producing a second-rate version of a man (i.e., a woman).

Given that Aristotle basically invented the science of biology, we can perhaps forgive him for not getting all the details right. But what does this mean for his ethical ideas, given that he grounds them, at least in part, in his ideas about biology? I think we can salvage Aristotle’s ethical theory if we are careful on two fronts. First, we must remember that what currently passes as “science” is not written in stone. If some of Aristotle’s ideas strike us as ridiculous or quaint, how will people think about current scientific theories twenty-three centuries into our future?

Second, we must not make our accounts of human nature more fine-grained than they need to be. While an understanding of human nature may guide and anchor how we approach cultural norms, it does not replace them. For Aristotle, the mean for an individual takes into account a whole host of factors, involving not just one’s species but also age, gender, occupation, health, place in society, and so on. If a set of identical twins grows up so that one becomes a football player and the other a sedentary accountant, the one should eat more than the other.

Likewise, the way individuals seek their overall well-being as organisms may take culture into account: An orthodox Jew should not strive to eat a moderate amount of pork. And that’s okay. Other cultural values, however, simply cannot be squared with human nature. If a society were to arise that advocated eating thumbtacks or forbade sleeping, there would be no healthy way to carry out such injunctions. Similar stories can be told about progressive movements that have changed societal values around race, gender, and sexuality. While Aristotle allows for some variety between cultural values, he does not say that “anything goes.”

In short, Aristotle presents us with a pluralist account of human virtue. Unlike the Ten Commandments, his ethical theory is not a list of particular injunctions and prohibitions but more a procedure for figuring out what would be appropriate in various situations. To the question, “What would a brave person do?” Aristotle would respond, “It depends on the circumstances; give me more information.” This, however, raises a final problem.

Situations that require brave responses often do not leave much time for thinking. If a child chases a stray ball into oncoming traffic, a teacher does not have time to consider all relevant details of the situation. A similar, though less drastic, story can be told about moderation: If we are out on the town and someone asks whether we want that “one more round” or offers to call us a cab, it is unlikely that we can give a fully thought-out response before the window of opportunity closes. So, while we may appreciate Aristotle’s desire to tailor our responses to particular circumstances, in the real world this may simply not be practical. This brings us to the final part of Aristotle’s account of virtue: habit.

If children manage to endure a flu shot without crying, we often praise them for being brave. But do we really mean that they are brave overall? If a child is unfortunate enough to need six shots in a week and manages not to cry only for the second and fourth of these, would we really call her brave overall? Isn’t it more accurate to say that we are recognizing that she performed a brave act in a couple instances and that we are encouraging her to act similarly in the future as may be required?

According to Aristotle, merely performing a brave act does not show that a person is brave. A person is brave only when she consistently acts bravely over a long period of time (i.e., when bravery has become a *habit*). And she must enjoy it. If, at a doctor’s command, I stop eating bacon and instead have a kale salad every night but I hate my greens and secretly dream of rib-sticking grease, I am not living the fullest life available to me. Likewise, a child may regularly though grudgingly clean his room in exchange for extra iPad time, but it is only when that child comes to enjoy putting his things in order that we would say he is a tidy child.⁵

In sum, if we still struggle with weakness of will when it comes to certain things, we have not yet *fully* acquired the relevant virtues. How do we get there? Practice. This may seem a bit ham-fisted, but if we take a step back, it makes sense. Aristotle is not saying that we can come to enjoy just anything. I will never acquire a taste for eating thumbtacks, no matter how much I practice. Virtuous activity, by contrast, is what helps me flourish as a human being, to be my best self. While it might take some work to get there, what in the long run could be more pleasurable: enjoying a fit and healthy body or a belly full of grease?

Some of these considerations are easily within the grasp of a child: being “good at” doing certain things, practicing to get better, learning to enjoy certain actions. Others require thinking about long-term goods in ways that will likely exceed a four-year-old’s horizons, but this merely underscores the importance of how teachers and parents raise children and the habits we encourage them to cultivate.

For Aristotle, the early stages of this are a matter of fairly mechanical repetition: Adults decide what is best for children, and children practice doing *that* until they acquire the right habits. Questioning whether these are the right habits can come later. Plato, at least in some texts, similarly advises that philosophical questioning should not be attempted by the young. Such advice runs counter to the whole philosophy for children movement.

When it comes to instilling virtues, how much should we merely dictate the “right” habits to children, and how much should we let them decide for themselves? One middle way is to teach children a general framework of moderation, excess, and deficiency and then let them discuss how to apply this framework to particular situations and contexts. This requires a willingness on the part of both children and adults to give *reasons* for their positions.

A child’s first response may be that staying up past his bedtime to watch more television is a good idea, but he will likely not have a good response to his parent’s explanation that it will leave him too tired to enjoy activities the following day. Such negotiations are bound to be messy, but in the long run, willingness to engage in such discussions proves to be the most effective way of helping children develop into their best selves.⁶

Discussion Questions for Teachers

1. Who are your role models? How are they leading the fullest life possible? What is it about them that you want to emulate? Is it a matter of character, accomplishment, or something else?
2. How do our interactions with children encourage certain character traits? Some of these might be intentional (e.g., be a good friend, share with others), but do some of our practices instill traits unintentionally (e.g., listen to authorities, don’t ask questions)?
3. Do your habits define you? What habits guide you through everyday life? Does it make sense to think of your character as a person in terms of these habits?

CHARACTER AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

How do we make virtues stick? As is commonly written in developmental psychology, parenting is the process of passing down the values of one generation to the next. The parent’s job should be as simple as deciding on the most important virtues and ensuring that these are instilled in the child. Parenting is a set of goal-directed behaviors that takes place in a culture, for a purpose. The job is complicated in its very definition: How do parents decide

which virtues are to be taught? And what are the best methods for passing these down?

Take the example of a six-month-old who can sleep for four hours at a stretch but has not yet strung two stretches together to make the magic eight that translates into sleeping through the night.

The baby, fed and warm, wakes and cries. Parents experience competing values based on their desired outcomes for this tiny human, and right off the bat, they're engaging in a midnight philosophical debate.

Should we pick her up and feed her? That will teach her to cry more, and she will become manipulative, even selfish. Or, maybe she will become independent and solve her own problems. Should we let her cry it out? She will learn that she can't depend on us and think we don't love her. Or, she will learn to put herself back to sleep alone, and then *we* can sleep. But does that make us selfish parents?

Parents then turn to their cultural referents: their own parents, social media, and the internet. There they will find a dozen solutions, including whole books devoted to this one problem. And still, they must decide. The debate itself is exhausting.

No wonder parents of children under five often become *absolutists*, choosing a specific way of dealing with sleep, manners, feeding, and toilet training that are carried out according to a method, book, or trainer or by copying their parents' ways. Their stated goal is to socialize their squalling infant child into a family member who is able to be polite, independent, and creative and to learn enough to succeed in school and life. "We just want our children to be happy," most parents will say. But it's not true. We want our children to be happy *and* successful.

The sheer variety of internet opinions on these small problems can make us think that North American parents are wildly different from each other. They're not! According to a 2014 survey of over three thousand families conducted by the Pew Research Center, the core values for parents to instill in children are hard work, independence, and good manners. These three were endorsed as "most important" by over 90 percent of responses, while tolerance, empathy, and patience, though important, were tops for fewer than 60 percent of parents, with curiosity named by less than half.

If the family goals for the young child are to instill hard work, independence, good manners, and school preparation, the ultimate joy of parenting is to see that these virtues become habits that are permanently ingrained in the child and persist through adolescence and beyond. There are hundreds of studies of parenting and child outcomes. Each shows a slightly different outcome depending on how the variables are measured. Most study parental

warmth and responsiveness, control, and the provision of cognitively stimulating activities. Children's outcomes include school achievement, positive mental health, and sharing parents' values.

Taken as a whole, psychological research tells us which parents make it all stick: In the West, it's those who use authoritative parenting. This is defined as combining high levels of communication and warmth with moderate levels of control and a confrontive way of asserting parental power to teach children.

Baumrind (2013) notes that "the kind of power that characterizes *authoritarian* parents is coercive (arbitrary, peremptory, domineering, and concerned with marking status distinctions), whereas the kind of power that characterizes *authoritative* parents is confrontive (reasoned, negotiable, outcome-oriented, and concerned with regulating behaviors)." This confrontive parenting often takes the form of a dialogue in which parents ask children to defend their choices, or imagine consequences for themselves and others; they sometimes present the opposite point of view, and even push children to make future plans for self-control or self-monitoring.

This confrontive parenting forces even very young children to be apologists for their own behaviors. The inner human is coached in training the inner animal. This method is related to improved verbal and self-regulation skills, better school performance, and a higher likelihood that children, as adults, will agree with their parents' beliefs (Baumrind 2013).

In elementary-school-aged and adolescent children, a similar technique is called "attitude inoculation" by social scientists. If children are presented with a one-sided argument with no counterarguments, their views are vulnerable to the first successful persuader they encounter away from home. But if they are exposed to a threat or a counterargument requiring them to marshal the evidence to support their own view, they are much less susceptible to persuasion. The successful parent helps children develop the ability to defend the family beliefs with a habit of debate, and this begins very young.

Thus, parents who wish their values to stick must let the devil in the door by encouraging inquiry, dialogue, discussion, listening, and debate. The philosophy-for-children approach encourages these skills.

TEACHER REFLECTION

Is the value we place on ourselves dependent on what we can do or on who we are? Can any one person be best at everything? The activities we planned for the study of virtue in Lesson 1 are a good example of how we had to alter our practice. *Blue Ribbon Puppies* is a story about what puppies are best at. As teachers implemented the opening activity for the Best versus Best At lesson arc, children discussed what characteristics made each item the best.

Teachers typically strive to encourage and support the development of self-concept and build self-esteem in early childhood games. Would this story raise this issue too close to home for the children? A child who is just learning self-awareness and coming to recognize her own capabilities needs encouragement to try new things and to accept that perhaps she might fail. But isn't it the teacher's role to protect these children? The lesson's opening activity was essentially pointing out how children will likely fail as they try new things! Our teachers were quite hesitant to embark on this plan for fear of making children feel bad about themselves.

Persisting through this challenge, we discovered that children could actually make the observation that, while some markers are good at making marks, other markers are not! They themselves were good at some things while still learning others. As one four-year-old said, "My dad is good at running, but I can't run that fast yet!"

Teachers learned to trust that, with good planning, we could avoid branches of the discussion that might bring the children to "a bad conclusion." Through reflecting on the lesson, we teachers put the spotlight on our own fear of failure in the classroom and on how this fear may lead us to protect our children too much, to the point of not allowing deep thinking to develop. We do not need to have all the answers!

LESSON 1A. BEST VERSUS BEST AT

Storybook: Crockett Johnson, *Blue Ribbon Puppies*

Materials: Assorted toys, a blue ribbon for each toy

Goals:

1. Children will show an understanding that the value of an object is related to its intended use by stating the different uses of specific toys.
2. Children will state the difference in meaning between "best" and "best at."

In this lesson, children will wrestle with the idea that a particular thing's excellence (virtue) depends on what kind of thing it is. A baseball bat may be excellent for hitting baseballs but useless for rowing a boat. Excellence ends up being relative. But "relative" can mean a couple of things: When people say that a value is relative, they typically mean "relative to someone's beliefs." This usually leads to a conversational dead end. Aristotle's idea is that excellence is relative to a thing's nature: If the nature of a marker is to write, an excellent marker writes well regardless of whether someone wants to write or not.

Contest—Round 1: Which Toy Is Best?

Hide all but one blue ribbon. Present the children with a small assortment of toys that can be used for wildly different things (e.g., swimming goggles, baseball bat, picture book, tricycle, wig). Tell the children, “We’re having a contest, and we’ll give a blue ribbon to the best toy,” so they must decide which *one* toy is best. There will likely be disagreement, so get the children to share their reasons. There is no need to reach consensus. Among other things, this will be a chance to practice Rule 3, “we respond.”

Story

An assortment of puppies is trotted out and each given a ribbon for its own particular feature (short, tall, spotted, etc.). That said, not every quality granted a ribbon is something we tend to value. Use this to encourage children to think about how there are multiple things that something can be “best at.” While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “Too fat” → Do you think they will take the ribbon away? Why?
- “Best *fat* puppy” → Is it possible to be the best fat puppy?
- “Too spotty” → Is it possible to be too spotty?
- “Too long” → What could a long puppy be useful for?
- “Too tall” → What could a tall puppy be useful for?
- “Too small” → Would you give an award for being small? Is there anything that small people can do better than big people?
- “Too plain” → What do you think is going to happen?

Contest—Round 2: Which Toy Is Best At . . . ?

Ask the children if they want to redo the contest, and bring out the extra ribbons. This time they will choose what each toy is “best at.” This will give a chance to pick up their discussion from the first round as they articulate what each toy is best at. The goal is *not* for them to agree that each toy is best at something; the goal is for them to play with the idea of “best” versus “best at” and to practice discussing positions with each other and giving reasons for those positions. If, in the end, they want to give all the ribbons to one particular toy, that’s fine.

LESSON 1B. GOOD VERSUS GOOD AT

Storybook: Julia Donaldson, *Tyrannosaurus Drip*

Materials: Assortment of toy dinosaurs (some friendly, some scary, some living in water, some living in air, etc.), art supplies

Goal: Children will explain the difference in meaning between being “good” morally and being “good at” an activity.

This will help children explore the connection between happiness and being good at being who or what you are. Teachers can introduce the idea of “character” (i.e., one’s virtues and vices) by first talking about individual “characters” within the story.

Game: Dinosaur Sorting and Charades

The last lesson arc explored artifacts. Since it doesn’t make much sense to talk about a happy baseball bat, we’re switching to (heavily personified) animals. Start by asking what we talked about last time. Present the toy dinosaurs, and ask the children what each is “best at.” Ask them to act out each quality: being scary, eating plants, swimming, and so on. Along the way, tell them to “think” about what each animal is “best at” and how they would act it out. By hitting the pause button in this way, you can help them practice Rule 2, “we think.”

Story

This is the tale of a duckbill dinosaur, Drip, who hatches in a tyrannosaurus nest. While Drip is a good little dinosaur (peaceful, kind), he’s not *good at* being a tyrannosaurus. His siblings, by contrast, are bad little dinosaurs (scary, aggressive) precisely because they are good at being tyrannosauruses. The story gives the chance to drive a wedge between “good” and “good at.” It also presents a narrative arc as Drip finds a place in the world where he can live according to his nature and thus be happy. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- First two pages → Are these herbivores or carnivores? Are they good or bad characters?
- Second two pages → Are these herbivores or carnivores? Are they good or bad characters?
- “The tyrannosaurus nest” → What do you think will happen?
- “His mouth is like a beak” → Is the mother right that the baby tyrannosauruses are “perfect”? Is there something wrong with the baby with a beak?
- “I’d rather eat a plant” → Is it okay that the baby doesn’t want to eat meat?

- “Down with bellyfulls” → Did Drip get the words wrong?
- “Up with bellyfulls” → Will Drip be good at swimming? Why?
- “Have some veg!” → Do you think Drip will be happy now?
- “It’s you!” → What’s happening here?
- “Up with bellyfulls” → What do you think will happen?
- “HELP!” → What happened now?
- “SPLASH!” → Are the tyrannosauruses good at swimming? What will happen?

Art Project: What Kind of Dinosaur Would You Be?

Ask children which dinosaur they would be. Let them choose from the toy dinosaurs present and act out what they would be “good at.” As they play, ask them questions such as these:

- Does doing that make you a good dinosaur?
- What kind of character does that? Good or bad?
- Do children usually do that?

The goal is to get them thinking a bit about what is characteristic of them as children/friends and whether being “good at” that is something that would make them a good or bad character.

LESSON 1C. HABIT

Storybook: Arnold Lobel, “Tomorrow,” from *Days with Frog and Toad*

Materials: None

Goals:

1. Children will define the term “habit” by giving an example from daily life.
2. Children will give examples of good and bad habits.
3. Children will understand that habits can be changed through repeated action.

In this lesson, children will think about what habits are, which are good to have, and how they may come to enjoy some of them. This will involve a fair deal of thinking about thinking.

Game: Simon Says

Open by asking the children what habits are. At some point, get in the idea (1) that habits are something you do without really thinking about it and (2) that you get them through practice. Then play Simon Says. When children make mistakes, point out that they are acting “by habit” and that they need to “practice” to get a new habit of “listening.” Among other things, this is a good time to practice Rule 1, “we listen.” While playing, ask questions such as these:

- Is it hard to do something when it’s not a habit?
- Can you change your habits? How?

Story

Toad’s house is a mess, but he puts off work until “tomorrow.” Partway through the story, he is so stressed out he simply does all the work so he can then relax. It would be easy to draw a clear “moral of the story” here: Don’t put off cleaning your room! Yet, behind such moralizing there is some pretty sophisticated moral psychology going on. Most people would agree that procrastination is not in our own self-interest, but we do it anyway. Why? Since your typical four-year-old will likely perform chores only grudgingly, the story gives a framework for them to reflect on their own habits. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “Today I will take life easy.” → Do you ever help clean? Do you like to clean?
- Jacket/dishes/plants → Is it good that Toad is leaving all this until tomorrow? What kind of character is Toad?
- “Tomorrow will be a very hard day for you.” → What do you think Toad will do?
- “He watered his plants” → Do you think Toad is having fun cleaning?
- End
 - What do you think Toad will do the next time his house needs cleaning?
 - Does Toad have good habits about cleaning?
 - What kind of character will he be now?

Charades: Act Out Habits You Want to Have

Have each child *think* about a habit they would like to have and then act it out. Other children will guess what this habit is. This is pretty abstract, so be

ready to act out a couple of habits to model what you're asking the children to do. As this is going on, ask questions such as these:

- What is our friend doing?
- Is this a good thing to do?
- Do *you* like doing this?
- What kind of character does this?

Ideally, you can find instances where different children have different habits or where individual children have changed habits over time. This can help children think of habits as malleable and subject to active reflection.

LESSON 1D. BECOMING OUR BEST SELVES

Storybook: Dan Bar-el, *Not Your Typical Dragon*

Materials: Legos

Goal: Children will demonstrate connections between being good, being good at, and practicing habits by explaining the dragon's experiences in this story.

In this lesson, children will review previous stories and start connecting the ideas we've looked at so far. If a thing's nature determines its excellence, how detailed should we be in describing that nature? If we're too vague, anything goes. If we are too detailed, the process becomes stifling. In the case of a human, Aristotle thinks that excellence is wrapped up in rational activity, but that can be realized in a wide range of occupations.

Opening Discussion

Quickly recap what we have done so far: toys, dinosaurs, habits. Refresh ideas:

- Different toys/dinosaurs/people are good at different things.
- We have to practice to be good at what we do.

As a way of introducing them to the day's book, ask them:

- What do you think a dragon will be good at?
- Do dragons need to practice this?

Story⁷

A young dragon tries to breathe fire but instead breathes frosting (for a cake), Band-Aids (at a doctor's office), and so on. Is he a good dragon? It seems essential that a dragon breathes *something*, although the options are wider than just fire. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “You’ll breath fire, too.” → Do you think Crispin is excited about breathing fire?
- “He didn’t tell his father that.” → Why didn’t Crispin tell his father about making tea?
- “I love whipped cream” → Is Crispin good at being a dragon? What kind of character is he?
- “Low on Band-Aids” → Is Crispin’s father right that dragons should breathe fire? How can Crispin get better at breathing fire?
- “So he ran away from home.” → How does Crispin feel? Would he feel better if he could breathe fire? Why?
- “Tell us what to do” → Do you think it is good for Sir George and Crispin to fight?
- “Teddy bears” → Does making angry faces make you feel angry? Want to try?
- “I will take you” → What do you think Crispin’s and George’s parents are going to think about them being friends?
- “Fire did not come out” → What do you think will happen?
- End → Was Crispin a good character? Was he good at being a dragon?

Art Project: Build a Dragon Out of Legos

Ask children to build dragons out of Legos. Have them *think* about what their dragons will be good at. As they work, engage them in discussion with questions such as these:

- Tell me about your dragon.
- What does your dragon do/breathe?
- Is your dragon good at doing that? Could he or she get better with practice?
- What kind of character is your dragon?
- Is your dragon happy?

NOTES

1. This chapter is based on the first two “books” of Aristotle’s work, *Nicomachean Ethics*. A “book” in this context is basically what would fit on a single scroll. This particular work is made up of ten books that are further divided into chapters. It has become traditional to refer to the work by an abbreviated form of its Latin title, *Ethica Nicomachea*, or EN. Putting all that together, standard citation is: EN book.paragraph (paragraphs are omitted when discussing a whole book). The work is named after Aristotle’s son, Nicomachus, who published the work after his father’s death.

2. In chapter 3, we use the terms—“absolutism,” “relativism,” and “pluralism”—to identify different types of questions. Here we apply the same general ideas to identify different types of position or, more exactly, different ways of holding opinions. See Table 3.1.

3. Aristotle’s discussion of study comes only at the very end of the work, EN 10.6–9.

4. The ancients placed little importance on skin color generally, and while they did have slaves, these tended to be simply people who had lost in war. Aristotle follows his culture here and does not associate natural slaves with any particular race.

5. At EN 7.1–10, Aristotle discusses the difference between the “continent” person, who does the right thing grudgingly, and the “temperate” person, who enjoys doing the right thing. These classes, along with the “incontinent” person, who wants to do the right thing but doesn’t, are further explored in Lesson 2.

6. Those wishing to go further and read Aristotle should look to EN 1–2. EN 1.4–5 sets out general criteria for what happiness is and surveys common views on the nature of happiness. EN 1.7 sets out a sketch of Aristotle’s theory of happiness and is the heart of the whole work. EN 1.8 applies this theory to the criteria set out in EN 1.4–5 and argues that it does what all the other views do, only better. EN 1.13 fills out details of Aristotle’s theory of soul that were made use of in the theory of EN 1.7.

EN 2.1–3 then presents virtues as a kind of habit. EN 2.4–5 dives into a couple of puzzles. EN 2.6–7 sets out Aristotle’s idea that virtues are aimed at “the mean.”

7. This book is somewhat long for young audiences. Please skip sections as needed.

Chapter 5

Lesson 2: Bravery

SOCRATES AND ARISTOTLE ON BRAVERY

What does a brave person look like? Popular culture shows heroes with capes and superpowers or adventurers dodging alien ray guns and navigating booby-trapped temples. But what of Captain Chesley Sullenberger, who in 2009 made a water landing in midtown New York after flying a passenger jet into a flock of geese? The 2016 movie *Sully* presents a mousey middle-aged man with a passion for playing it safe. He's hardly the typical Hollywood hero. But was he brave as he calmly (and safely) landed a jet in the Hudson? If so, was he brave before he encountered this sudden test? How could you tell?

Greek thought linked bravery to military contexts. The Greek word *andreia* literally means “manliness” and in different contexts can be translated as “bravery,” “courage,” or even “valor.”¹ The Socratic dialogue dedicated to exploring bravery, *Laches*, begins with a group of four men who have just observed a demonstration of fighting in armor. Two of them are fathers who want their sons to turn out better than they themselves did. So they seek out two military generals, Nicias and Laches, to get their opinions on whether lessons in fighting in armor could help.

Laches brings in Socrates, who points out that the ultimate value of such lessons is not the skill of fighting in armor but the effect such training has on one's character. In today's terms, if we send our children to soccer practice or piano lessons with little intention of them becoming professional athletes or musicians, what is it we're hoping they will get out of this? In the case of fighting in armor, Socrates suggests that instilling bravery is the real point.

The rest of the *Laches* dialogue is devoted to finding a definition of “bravery” that will pick out *all* instances of bravery and *only* instances of

bravery in a nonsuperficial way. Laches begins by saying that bravery is “keeping one’s post” (190e).² Socrates responds that this is too narrow, since it leaves out instances where someone can be brave while *not* keeping their post (e.g., in a well-controlled retreat). Today we might think of someone fighting cancer, who is not *literally* keeping a post.

Laches regroups and suggests that bravery is “endurance of soul” (192c). While this is more encompassing than “keeping one’s post,” it runs into the opposite problem that it is too broad, as it includes such things as stubbornness, eating contests, and commitment to vice. Surely we don’t call these brave!

Laches tries one more time, suggesting that bravery is “wise endurance” (192d). Socrates responds that in some cases a person’s wisdom/knowledge detracts from his or her bravery. Preschoolers may exhibit great bravery in riding a bike without training wheels. As Socrates would put it, such children are not “wise” about bicycles. This is exactly why they are brave. Adults who have mastered unaided cycling, by contrast, are not brave simply for riding without training wheels, since they know what they are doing. At this point, Laches admits defeat and passes the baton to Nicias, who comes at the problem from another angle.

What are we to make of this discussion? First off, bravery has more to do with how a person *acts* than how a person *looks*. That said, we cannot simply say that some actions are always brave: Sometimes it’s brave for a soldier to keep his post; sometimes it’s brave for him to run away. Furthermore, what is brave for one person is not for another: Riding without training wheels is brave for a preschooler but not for most adults.

In general, bravery seems to consist not merely of performing a certain set of actions but in *how* those actions are performed. Laches suggests that it is only actions done “wisely” that count as brave (i.e., those done for good reasons). Yet, Socrates responds that, in some cases (e.g., cycling without training wheels), the wiser a person is, the less brave she is. At this point it might be tempting to throw up our hands and say that bravery is whatever you want it to be! But let’s not give up quite yet. In general terms, Greek philosophy developed as Socrates raised a bunch of puzzles that later figures attempted to answer, Aristotle foremost among them.

In responding to puzzles about bravery, Aristotle distinguished between two kinds of wisdom. On the one hand is the *reason* for an action, as Aristotle put it, “acting for the sake of the fine.” On the other hand is the *know-how* inherent in being able to perform certain tasks. The brave person, according to Aristotle, is confident in her own abilities. Yet, Aristotle also makes room for emotion, suggesting that the brave person is the one who feels fear in the right circumstances and not in the wrong ones. Putting all this together,

Aristotle defines “bravery” as “a mean of confidence and fear aimed at the fine.” Let’s walk through this.

When Aristotle says “mean,” think Goldilocks: neither too little nor too much. A “mean of fear” means fearing things that are actually dangerous and not fearing things that are not. In normal circumstances, bunnies are not dangerous.³ A person who fears bunnies is excessively fearful. This person is being a coward. Moving trains, on the other hand, are always dangerous. The person who plays chicken with a moving train is deficient in fear. This person is being rash.

So should a brave person feel fear? According to Aristotle, it depends. In some cases, ones involving real danger, a person cannot be brave *without* feeling fear. This is not to say that bravery is whatever you want it to be, since objective facts of the situation are what determine whether an act is brave. Likewise for confidence, although here the objective facts involve individuals’ abilities.

A “mean of confidence” means neither underestimating nor overestimating one’s own abilities. If a preschooler has successfully ridden without training wheels but shrinks from the task now, she is being underconfident. This is a form of cowardice. If she decides that her background with bikes has prepared her to drive Mommy’s car, she is being overconfident. This is a form of rashness. The brave person ends up being the one who walks the razor’s edge, stepping up to challenges but without getting carried away.

But not all challenges are worth stepping up to. It might be worth it for an adult to run into a burning building to save an infant, but running into a burning building to save a favorite sweater is foolhardy. Aristotle thus finishes off his definition by adding that brave actions are those aimed at “the fine.” While we might quibble about various cases (e.g., climbing Mount Everest to see whether you can), in most cases it is easy enough to distinguish between good and bad reasons for entering into dangerous situations.

Aristotle’s brave person is someone you would want around in a crisis. She will step up to challenges but not be stupid about it. She will get things done. This is one way a person may show excellence/virtue of character. That’s not to say that Aristotle had the final word on this question: Plato, in *Republic*, gives a different account of what bravery is; the Epicureans have another theory; the Stoics have yet another. Still, Aristotle’s account has become a classic thanks to its mix of clear parameters and flexibility of application. Together with *Laches*’ puzzles, it provides a useful frame of reference for you to help children think through questions of bravery. In what follows, we provide three lesson plans for helping children think through these issues.⁴

Discussion Questions for Teachers

1. Does knowing what you are doing make you more or less brave? Why? Give examples.
2. Who is the person you would want around in an emergency? Why? Would you describe that person as brave?
3. What is the bravest thing a person could do? Have each person answer. From that pool of answers, determine which one is *in fact* the bravest. How does your discussion relate back to the ideas put forward by Socrates and Aristotle?

BRAVERY AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

How do children learn to be brave? According to Aristotle, the brave person feels fear in the right circumstances but not in the wrong ones. Brave people may stand their ground and not flee, or they might endure unimaginably awful physical circumstances without giving up. A brave person may feel or show fear but act bravely anyway. Bravery, then, is a combination of difficult circumstances and brave reactions. This situational specificity leads us directly into a realm of psychological theory and experimentation: social learning theory.

Psychologically, how do young children learn to be brave? Bravery is a behavior, and so it is learned the way all other behaviors are learned: through a process of repeated modeling by a conspecific, either in person or indirectly, and reinforcement for bravery. Psychologist Albert Bandura showed, through famous experiments in which children watched other people hitting dolls, that much of our learning about interpersonal behaviors comes from watching others interact. I don't have to be brave myself and face rewards or punishments. I can watch a sick friend or a firefighter and learn by example. Our children learn to be brave by watching us.⁵

My rewards don't have to be external, either. Pride, satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, or seeing that firefighter praised can all influence a child's brave behavior. Psychologists call these "vicarious rewards." Brave behaviors are learned in a social context, and the situation, actors, and observers all influence what the child will learn (Bandura 1992).

Bandura posits that a child's copying of a model proceeds in three stages. In the first, the child acts bravely because of fear of punishment or ridicule or to avoid being left out. This takes place at ages two to five or so and is called *compliance*. The child develops positive feelings for the rule-givers next, and

identification ensues—when the child wants to obey out of a desire to be like the powerful adult or peer (ages four to ten or so).

Young children particularly look to teachers, parents, and peers for examples of how to act and especially of how members of their own gender should act. Social roles are learned and reinforced during these early years. In adolescence, there comes the final stage of *internalization*, when the child brings that sense of bravery into her own self and makes the rules for behavior her own.

Preschoolers, then, base definitions of “bravery” on what they’ve witnessed and been told, often following stereotypes like a soldier, firefighter, or BMX bike rider. There is very little difference between looking brave and being brave because the preschooler is just beginning to articulate an inner world. P4C helps children give words to these subtle differences as they think about and respond to questions about bravery. As children are “gender detectives” in the preschool years, and as our Western culture has strong gender roles associated with physical bravery, teachers should be ready to explain that bravery is seen in both boys and girls.

Some children have trouble being brave. *Bravery training* takes several forms (e.g., guiding children through puppet scenarios and videos of children who take chances despite fear). In hospitals, when chronically ill children come to fear the MRI or tube feeding, psychologists use systematic desensitization to introduce children to small bits of the fearful situation over time until they become accustomed to it and able to endure without fear (Hawkins 1991). This shows again the links between experience and bravery: If one child watches three older siblings ride bikes, she will be “braver” than the child experiencing bikes for the first time.

For psychologists, children’s bravery therefore depends on their age, the situation, the models they have seen, and the need for bravery in their daily lives.

TEACHER REFLECTION

Are you brave because you look like a superhero? Can you be brave even though you do not have the costume? How were you brave? When asked to describe their bravery, some may begin to question their ideas. One child, for instance, stated emphatically that she was brave when she got back on her bicycle after falling down on the sidewalk. Another said that he was brave when he swam across the pool by himself.

Both of these instances reflect bravery about accomplishing a skill, but they also signal an understanding that trying new things is scary. That may lead to a dialogue about whether you can be brave without being scared, albeit not

too scared that you do not try, the ultimate definition of “cowardice” perhaps. Teachers were mindful of not leading discussions into which *child* was bravest, as the dialogue is not about competition but rather about categorizing and dissecting what being brave means to them.

The games used in this lesson brought aspects of the concept of bravery right to the surface for many children. While some children were more scared than others to play, particularly the blindfold game, they could all relate to the characters in the stories. What was interesting for us was how each child’s personal experience of bravery was so individual.

For some children, the experience of being blindfolded was too scary, but when offered to have a friend hold their hand through the process, their fear subsided enough to participate. The addition of the friend’s support and a “helping hand” made the discussion go in the direction of how friendship sometimes mitigates fear. For us, this indicated how our school rules, “be safe” and “be a good friend,” had affected the children’s idea of bravery.

The blindfold game provides a new lens on bravery and helps teachers cause useful confusion in the children’s thinking so they may “play” with their understanding of bravery. Teachers reflected that the game placed a spotlight on aspects of each child they might have suspected but not observed. It also helped children overcome their fears or perhaps give voice to them honestly. In this, teachers became aware of how children thought about being brave. This provided a hook to which teachers could relate in future situations to jolt the child’s memory and clarify the concept even further. Here is an example of the mediation of transcendence.

For the drawings, children talked about how doing something with someone made the new experience “not so scary.” One child described her drawing of being brave: “Being brave ice skating with my mommy.” Another said, “Being brave with Uncle Matt, Matt.” Another stated, “I’m ice skating by myself.”

Still another child stated that, while watching a movie, she was “a little bit scared and brave. I was scared when the hyenas were chasing the gazelles.” Yet, she continued watching the movie in spite of feeling scared, so she was brave. Still others narrated imaginary scenes where they might need to summon their bravery, as in “I am courageous in my space rocket,” or another, “I am a courageous scuba diver.”

Situations that require bravery became a frequent topic of conversation between children and teachers. Imagined situations that require bravery led us to focus the children on how trying new things is brave. We likened bravery to trying new skills practicing things before we get them just right and, for some children, overcoming perfectionist traits that would otherwise prevent them from attempting something challenging or new. Programmatically, the

philosophy project has changed how we approached activities with children. It has altered our daily interactions.

LESSON 2A. LOOKING BRAVE VERSUS BEING BRAVE

Storybook: Robert Munsch, *Paper Bag Princess*

Materials: “River,” figurines depicting different people (e.g., firefighter, astronaut, princess, child, elder)

Goal: Children will demonstrate an understanding of bravery, including being brave and acting brave, by responding to questions about the story.

In this lesson, we will build on the discussion of character by thinking about whether particular characters are brave. Push children to go beyond superficial indicators (gender, clothes) and to start thinking about the connection between bravery, action, and “being smart.” We’ll come back to these ideas later. Today we’re just planting the seeds.

River Game

Present one doll/picture at a time, and ask one child whether that figure is brave. Everyone who agrees with this child’s answer will stand on his or her side of the river. Everyone who disagrees will stand on the other side. You can then ask questions such as these:

- Why did you choose to be on this side?
- Why do you, <second child>, agree or disagree with <first child>?
- What does a brave person look like?
- Can only someone who looks like this be brave? Why?

The more mini discussions you can get going, the better. Among other things, this will help practice Rule 2, “we respond.” But don’t take too long on this (maybe ten minutes).

Story

This bit of gender reversal shows a well-dressed yet useless prince and a princess who loses her finery but steps up to defeat a dragon. The story provides a framework for digging beneath appearances. Strike up conversations while reading by asking questions such as these:

- “Elizabeth was” → Are these people brave? How can you tell?
- “Elizabeth decided” → Is Elizabeth still a princess if she doesn’t have nice clothes?
- “Finally, Elizabeth came” → Would you knock on a dragon’s door? Is Elizabeth brave?
- “Is it true” → Why do you think Elizabeth is asking the dragon to do this?
- “So the dragon jumped up” → Is Elizabeth being smart? Is she being brave?
- “Elizabeth walked right over” → What kind of character is Roland? What do you think will happen?
- “‘Roland,’ said Elizabeth” → Was Roland brave? Was Elizabeth brave? What kind of clothes does a brave person have?

Art Project: Role-Play with Figurines

To continue the discussion, return to the dolls/pictures. Provide a series of dangerous situations, and ask the children to pick a figure and say how he or she would respond. As appropriate, ask questions such as these:

- Is that a brave thing to do?
- Is he or she being smart?
- Can princesses/girls be brave?
- Do people’s clothes make them brave? What does make them brave?

Some possible scenarios (if you have more figures to use, all the better):

- A dragon is attacking the castle!
- There is a monster under the bed!
- A boat is sinking!

LESSON 2B. BRAVERY VERSUS FEAR

Storybook: Arnold Lobel, “Dragons & Giants,” from *Frog and Toad Together*

Materials: Blindfold (e.g., a necktie), paper, drawing supplies

Goals:

1. Children will build and state definitions of “bravery,” “fear,” and “danger.”
2. Children will identify one other person’s view and tell how theirs is different.

As children explore the relation between bravery, fear, and danger, they don't need to reach a particular answer (e.g., Aristotle's). But they should articulate their own views, realize when others differ from them, and give reasons for and against these views.

Game: Blindfolding

Blindfold one child at a time, and have his or her classmates help the child perform some task. You might hide a stuffed animal and have the other children call out "hot" when the child is getting close and "cold" when he or she is moving in the wrong direction. During the game, ask questions such as these:

- Can you see?
- Are you afraid? Why?
- Are you being brave? Why?

It's best to sprinkle these questions around, not asking them all of one child. The point is to get children to think in an experiential way about the connection of bravery and fear. If the children bring up the topic of danger, all the better. This game will help practice Rule 1, "we listen."

Story

This story is a classic in P4C circles, as it gently raises issues of bravery in ways that invite discussion. It is also quite episodic, inviting mini discussion after each scene. Get discussions going by asking questions such as those that follow. If the opportunity comes up to connect the story to the blindfolding game, help the children make the connections explicit.

- Mirror scene → Can you tell if someone is brave from what they look like? (You might connect this to *Paper Bag Princess*.)
- Snake scene → Do you think Toad is afraid? (This could be a good spot for getting children to disagree, since Toad *says* he's not afraid but what he *does* is run away.)
- Avalanche scene → Are Frog and Toad in danger? Are they being brave? (You might get a disagreement going about whether someone can be brave while running away.)
- Hawk scene → Are Frog and Toad being smart? Are they being brave?
- Hiding scene → Frog and Toad *feel* brave. Are they really brave? Why or why not?

Art Project: Draw a Time You Were Brave

To help children process all these ideas, ask them to draw a time they were brave. As they work, engage them in conversation with you, and ideally with each other, by asking them questions about their pictures. You can use the following questions as models, but it's best to run with whatever the children are producing.

- What's happening in your picture?
- Are you in danger?
- Are you afraid?
- How are you being brave?

LESSON 2C. BRAVE VERSUS RECKLESS

Storybook: Kevin Henkes, *Sheila Rae, the Brave*

Materials: Clay

Goal: Children will identify the difference between brave and reckless behavior.

This brings in Aristotle's final facet of bravery: that brave deeds, unlike reckless ones, pursue some good, worthwhile purpose, or as Aristotle puts it, "the fine." This is, perhaps, the most abstract concept we have dealt with thus far.

Game: Scary Animal Charades

Pick one child at a time, and ask him or her to think about the scariest animal and then act that animal out. You may then ask the other children:

- What animal is our friend acting out? How can you tell?
- Would you go up to this animal or run away?
- Would going up to this animal be brave or just reckless?

Get children thinking about the *reason* behind actions and how seemingly brave actions, if done for unworthy ends, may not actually be brave. That is Aristotle's view, at least. If the children seem to agree, great. If not, don't force it on them. You may also point out moments when children can observe themselves and others thinking. This will help reinforce Rule 2, "we think."

Story

This is a story of two sisters. Sheila Rae, who is repeatedly called brave, does several daring actions for no useful purpose. Her sister, Louise, whom Sheila Rae calls a “scaredy-cat,” is more reserved but steps up when Sheila has foolishly gotten lost and leads her sister home. If Aristotle is right that brave actions must be aimed “at the fine,” there seems to be a mismatch between which sister acts bravely and which is called brave. This mismatch can be used to spark discussion. While reading, pause to ask questions such as these:

- Spider → Is kissing a spider a good idea?
- Big black dog → Would any of you go up to that dog?
- Tied-up Wendel → Is tying someone up a good thing to do?
- Bicycle with no hands and eyes closed → Is Sheila Rae being smart? Is she being brave?
- Sheila breaks tree’s fingers → What will happen if Sheila Rae keeps acting like this?
- Sheila thought horrible thoughts → Is Sheila Rae in danger? Is she still being brave?
- Louise says, “Follow me!” → Now who is being brave?
- End → Who do you think was more brave: Sheila Rae or Louise? Why?

The story may raise ideas from previous games, stories, and art projects: looking brave versus being brave, danger, fear. If the opportunity comes up, help children make these connections explicit.

Art Project: Sculpt a Time You Did Something Reckless

Have children use clay to depict (i.e., sculpt and act out) a time they did something reckless. While they work, engage them in conversation with questions such as these:

- What are you doing?
- Why was this a reckless thing to do?
- Was it dangerous?
- Were you brave?

NOTES

1. Philosophers today use these terms interchangeably. To avoid confusion, it might be best to use only the terms “brave” and “bravery” when dealing with children.
2. All references to Plato give the marginal “Stephanus” number + letter. These are keyed to the first printed version of Plato’s works in Greek, published by Stephanus in the sixteenth century, and are consistent across English translations (unlike translations’ page numbers).
3. We could, of course, imagine instances when bunnies might be dangerous, such as causing allergies, spreading viruses, or hopping onto landmines. For the moment, let us stipulate that we’re *not* talking about those.
4. Those wishing to go beyond the present chapter should read Aristotle, EN 3.6–9. Plato’s dialogue, *Laches*, starts out with a discussion of education (*Laches* 178a–190b), which raises the question: What is courage? The first attempt to respond, which is discussed in this chapter, follows 190c–194b. A second attempt follows 194b–201c, although both prove unsuccessful.
5. Children also watch films, cartoons, and video games, where they may learn that bravery means physical violence for a cause.

Chapter 6

Lesson 3: Moderation and Self-Control

THE ANCIENTS ON MODERATION AND SELF-CONTROL

Have you ever known better but done something anyway? Why did you do it? Sure, there are times when other people can force you to do things against your will, but how can you do things against your own will? Alternatively, have you ever committed to a New Year's resolution that you really believed in only to give up on it mid-January?

As we saw in Lesson 2, there is little point in knowing the right thing to do if you lack the bravery to overcome external obstacles. Bravery is thus counted as a cardinal (i.e., “hingeing”) virtue on which other virtues turn. But the Greeks saw the need to overcome internal obstacles as well. They thus posited another virtue on which all others turn: *sōphrosunē*.

Translating *sōphrosunē* into English is tricky. “Prudence” is perhaps the closest we have, though its shortened form, “prude,” suggests people who look down their noses at fun. “Temperance” is another option, though, thanks to teetotalers, it is now associated with complete abstinence from drinking.

“Moderation” comes closer to the Greek, since a person with *sōphrosunē* will go for neither too little nor too much. Yet, in calling a person moderate, we don't say much about whether a person is willingly moderate or not. “Self-control,” by contrast, brings in this voluntary element but leaves out the idea of hitting the proper mean. The two terms taken together, “moderation” and “self-control,” get pretty close. We thus commit two lesson arcs to each.

The reason *sōphrosunē* is hard for us to translate may be that it runs counter to large stretches of contemporary society. The American dream isn't to work hard to have *enough*. It's to work hard to have *more* than our parents did. In turn, we look to make a better life for our children, and the cycle continues as new generations are buried under more and more stuff.

Sure, there is the tiny house movement and minimalists who strive to live with as few material belongings as possible, but these are movements precisely because mainstream American culture is unreflectively devoted to excess. What started out as a constitutional right to make a life for oneself has been exploited by the advertising industry for so long that popular American culture lacks a robust vocabulary for even talking about moderation!

The ancient world was not so different from ours. Classical Athens was a rapidly expanding empire whose civic buildings and religious festivals would make the Kardashians look reserved. A few centuries later, Roman emperors threw parties with price tags in the millions. Philosophical praise of moderation has, to some extent, always been countercultural. Yet, the ancient counterculture produced a richer vocabulary than more recent efforts, such as the temperance movement, which merely trades one extreme (drunkenness) for another (abstinence). Part of that richness springs from a debate over what exactly *sōphrosunē* consists of.

The most direct way to think about this virtue is to reflect on those instances when it breaks down: the cases of weakness of will, what the Greeks called *akrasia*, with which this lesson began. What exactly *are* we doing when we act against our own best judgment?

Socrates argued that weakness of will is not actually possible.¹ This will likely strike most of us as ridiculous. Who among us hasn't ever had that extra round or decided not to floss, knowing full well that we weren't acting in our own best interests? Yet, on reflection, in all such instances the course of action we take has *something* good about it. We might want an extra cookie or another round of drinks, but we don't have the same problem with eating broken glass or drinking motor oil. The reason is simple: Consuming cookies and drinks is pleasant; consuming broken glass and motor oil is not.

Insofar as pleasure is a kind of good, Socrates argues, even in cases of weakness of will we are still acting for the sake of the good. Or, rather, we are acting for what *appears* to be good. If we work against our own self-interest, we have simply miscalculated, usually letting short-term goods (the pleasure of an extra cookie or round) blind us to long-term consequences (tomorrow's hangover or ruining a supper that someone lovingly cooked for us). Even if we get such calculations wrong, at the moment we *think* that what we're doing is for the best. And thus, according to Socrates, we are *not* actually acting against our best judgment.

If you are unconvinced by Socrates's theory, you are not alone. Aristotle took it as obvious that we do at times knowingly act against our own best judgment, and he used this as evidence for rejecting Socrates's account of human motivation. Plato, meanwhile, used such lapses in judgment as key pieces of evidence for his theory of the human soul (*psychē*).

According to Plato, moments of *akrasia* represent not just weakness of will but also inner conflict. Given that conflict can only occur between two or more parties, Plato argues, it must be that our souls have more than one part. In moments when we act against our better judgment, it is because our “appetitive” part, which cares only for pleasure, has won out over our rational part, which aims at the good.

Then there are times when we gawk at car crashes and then feel bad about ourselves for doing so. There is nothing particularly *bad* or irrational about this. It’s just tasteless. Plato concludes that, in addition to reason and appetite, our soul has a third “spirited” part that is concerned with matters of honor and shame. It is this part, rather than reason, that gets upset with us for our moments of rubbernecked weakness.

Sōphrosunē, for Plato, comes about when the rational part of our souls takes charge and spirit helps it keep appetite in check. The result is a kind of psychic harmony in which each part of the soul pursues its distinctive good but in ways that do not interfere with the other two parts. According to this theory, pleasure is fine so long as it does not lead us into shameful action, and it is reason’s job to figure out where to draw the line.²

Aristotle followed Plato in dividing the soul into three parts, albeit three slightly different ones. Taking a more biological approach, Aristotle treated the soul as simply that by which a living thing carries out the activities characteristic of life, and he divided the soul according to these functions. The most basic functions of life are nutrition, growth, and reproduction. As we saw in Lesson 1, Aristotle attributes these to the “nutritive” part of the soul and argues that this is something we share with plants.

The next level of life function includes sensation, memory, and the ability to move. Aristotle attributes these to the “sensory” part of the soul and argues that we share them with nonhuman animals. Note, however, that one cannot have a sensory part without a nutritive part. Meanwhile, the addition of a sensory soul changes how a life-form goes about the activities of its nutritive soul: While plants may stand around waiting for food to come to them, animals perceive their food and go to it.

The final level of life function is reason, which Aristotle argues is distinctive of humans and gods. And just as the addition of a sensory soul affects how one performs nutritive functions, the addition of reason affects the activities of both. An oak tree stands around waiting for food; a tiger runs after its prey; a human cooks meals in complicated ways tied up with culture and knowledge of nutrition.

Aristotle approaches *sōphrosunē* from two different angles. The first lines up with what we would call “moderation” (EN 3.10–12). Along with Plato, Aristotle agrees that moderation is a kind of balancing act, and he fleshes out what this looks like on a practical level. His basic idea is that moderation

strikes a healthy balance between the two extremes of excess and deficiency. Ten pounds of pasta is simply too much for dinner. This is not healthy. On the flip side, eating nothing for dinner is also unhealthy, albeit in a different way. The “golden mean” lies somewhere in between.

You might think that we could simply average the two (zero pounds and ten pounds) and conclude that five pounds of pasta is the way to go. This misses Aristotle’s point. The mean is always relative to the individual’s circumstances. This is not to say that what I *think* is right for me *is* right for me; rather, the circumstances of my health, age, occupation, and place in society come together to determine what’s right for me in a given circumstance. When it comes to food, half a pound of pasta might be just right for a sixty-year-old accountant, while two pounds of pasta could be just right for a twenty-five-year-old football player. If these two were to switch diets without changing their circumstances, both would run into health problems.

The trouble with moderation is that excess is often fun. Eating gives us pleasure, so we want to do more of it than we need to. On the flip side, flossing is boring, so we want to do less of it than we should. With this, we return to questions of weakness of will. According to Aristotle, it is better to be moderate than immoderate. What’s best of all, though, is to *enjoy* being moderate. How do we get there? Practice!

According to Aristotle, *sōphrosunē* is acquired by using reason to rule our appetites through habituation (EN 2.1–4). Or, more poetically, our inner human trains our inner animal. Eating is pleasant. And if we practice eating moderately, over time we will come to enjoy moderate eating and curb our desire for more than is healthy. It is at this point that we have the virtue of *sōphrosunē* in the fullest sense.

Against Socrates, Aristotle argues that, when we act against our best judgment, we simply show that we lack the best habits. On this view, *akrasia* is a real possibility. Yet, Aristotle’s setup also carves out a middle position between *akrasia* and *sōphrosunē* (i.e., those times when we do what is moderate but don’t enjoy it). Aristotle calls this state *enkrasia*, which is a sort of second-rate virtue, or perhaps training in virtue.³ It is good insofar as it keeps the individual healthy but bad insofar as the individual does not enjoy it.

Given that habits take time to develop, Aristotle thinks this is the best a child can hope for. When it comes to questions of cookies, a four-year-old will experience *enkrasia* as an exercise in self-control. Finally, the worst state of all, *asōphrosunē* (intemperance), is when one does not even know what the mean would be and thus does not act on or enjoy it (see [Table 6.1](#) for a summary).

As in most instances, Aristotle comes across as the champion of common sense. Yet, his account of *sōphrosunē* rests on a particular way of dividing the human soul. As we see with Freud, who divides the soul into yet another set

Table 6.1: (In)temperance and (In)continence

	<i>asōphrosunē/ intemperance</i>	<i>akrasia/ incontinence</i>	<i>enkrasia/ continence</i>	<i>sōphrosunē/ temperance</i>
Know the mean	–	+	+	+
Act on the mean	–	–	+	+
Enjoy the mean	–	–	–	+

of three, the psychological underpinnings of Aristotle's views are not uncontroversial. At least one school rejected Aristotle's ideas outright.

The Stoics were a Hellenistic (post-Aristotelian) school who elaborated what they claim to have been Socratic ethics. According to Stoicism, the soul has only one part: the rational part. While emotions exist, at a basic level they are simply beliefs about the world. Pain is the belief that something bad is present. Fear is the belief that something bad is coming. Pleasure is the belief that something good is present, and so on. The fact that reason and emotion sometimes seem to conflict is, for the Stoics, merely evidence of how thoroughly confused we are about questions of value.

If we saw the world correctly, the Stoics argue, we would understand that what matters is not what happens to us but how we respond to it. If my phone breaks, I can feel sorry for myself and everything I'm missing, or I can enjoy the respite from social media while my phone gets fixed. If I get into a fight with a friend, I can blame this other person and feel sorry for myself, or I can use it as an opportunity to take a hard look at my own shortcomings and grow as a person. If I become seriously ill, I can worry about all the good things that will not happen to me, or I can come to appreciate the experiences and people already in my life.

In short, suffering builds character.⁴ Or, to put it somewhat less bleakly, everyday life provides constant teachable moments and opportunities for character development. How we act on these opportunities depends on which view of the human soul we accept.

For Aristotle (and Plato to some extent), character development is a matter of habituating the nonrational, appetitive part of the soul. When it comes to young children, this will largely take the form of a teacher (who knows what's best) forcing the child to perform virtuous actions until the child acquires the correct habits and comes to enjoy them.

For the Stoics (and Socrates), there is no nonrational part of the soul. Character development is thus a much more rational process, as it calls on us to stop and reflect: Why do I respond to things as I do? What assumptions are guiding my actions? How do my responses show what I actually value? Are these values and assumptions really going to help me have the best life

I can? In this respect, at least, the Stoic/Socratic view of the soul and character development provides a more robust rationale for engaging children in philosophy than the theories of Plato or Aristotle do.

How should we translate all this into four-year-old terms? Underlying all these debates is the idea that human motivation is complex, and different philosophers have tried to explain this complexity in different ways:

- Short-term versus long-term goods (Socrates)
- Reason versus appetite (Plato)
- State of our habits (Aristotle)
- Events versus how we respond to them (Stoics)

In all of this, we have explored the virtue of *sōphrosunē* from two different angles. All generally agree that “moderation” involves striking a healthy balance, and Aristotle elaborated that this will involve striking a mean between what is too little or too much for the individual’s particular circumstances: age, health, occupation, and so on.

“Self-control,” in turn, comes in a variety of forms. For Aristotle, it is a matter of practicing moderation, even grudgingly (*enkrasia*), with the goal of making moderation a habit that people actually enjoy (*sōphrosunē*). The Stoics go further and make rational reflection on how we respond to our environment the core of the moral life. While it is easy for us to get lost in the details, children deal with conflicting desires all the time. In the lessons that follow, we lay out strands from this tangle of ideas as a way to help children think through these conflicts.⁵

Discussion Questions for Teachers

1. How much stuff do you really need? How many possessions could you get rid of and still lead a worthwhile life?
2. Have you ever “known better” and done something anyway? What were you thinking? Do the theories of Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle help you make sense of your behavior?
3. Are there habits you wish you had? Are there habits you wish you didn’t have? If so, what’s keeping you from changing?

MODERATION AND SELF-CONTROL IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

How do children learn to stop when they just want to *go*? In preschool children, moderation and self-control are essential skills to develop in preparation for kindergarten and the rest of life. Children are learning to control their bodies in space, their powerful emotions, their ability to pay attention to tasks, and their means of expressing themselves.

It's not surprising that the architecture of a developing brain underlies these areas of skill during the preschool years. As young children grow in experience, action, and wisdom, their brains are also growing at a furious rate. More than a million new neural connections are formed every second in the first few years of life. After this period of proliferation, connections are cut back through a process of pruning, where unused neural pathways die. These pathways develop in a prescribed order, starting with vision, touch, and hearing, then language and thinking skills.

As neurons grow, they are enveloped in a fatty sheath called myelin. Increased myelination is correlated with an increase in speed of thinking and the ability to inhibit a response. The ability to stop doing something you really want to do, like throwing a toy or hitting another child, develops gradually, as the child is taught to inhibit, and the brain develops enough to make this possible. Fred Rogers wrote of this important skill in a song that was instrumental in his famous testimony before Congress on the importance of PBS.⁶

Last to develop are the so-called *executive function* (EF) *skills*, also called executive control. These are the processes children need when they have to concentrate, pay attention, and choose to pay attention to one thing (teacher's voice) instead of another (fire truck). EF skills also include the ability to wait and to have self-control and self-discipline. It is generally agreed that there are three core EF skills: inhibition, working memory, and cognitive flexibility (Diamond 2013).

The Stanford marshmallow test is a look at children's ability to delay gratification, a special kind of EF. A researcher places a treat before a child and gives her a choice: Eat it now, or wait and get two. Older children are much better at waiting than are younger ones. In an EF task focused on selective attention, where children sort cards by one rule (color) and then must switch to another rule (shape), three-year-olds fail, and four-year-olds pass (Perone et al. 2017).

These skills mostly use brain areas in the prefrontal cortex. This area is the last to develop fully, not achieving final growth until adolescence. Further, if you are stressed, sad, lonely, or sick, your prefrontal cortex bears the blow,

and thinking gets confused as a result. Many adults, whether unschooled or damaged in some way, have poor EF skills.

The good news is that EF skills and the prefrontal cortex get stronger with experience and practice. EF training benefits those who have the worst skills more than those who only need a little improvement. At any age, these skills can be improved, but in preschool children, activities like interactive games, taekwondo, and traditional martial arts training, thinking strategies interventions, and curricula specifically targeting self-control and discussions of alternative solutions to problems have been effective at increasing EF skills. P4C may also have this important outcome.

TEACHER REFLECTION

In the games planned for the moderation and self-control lesson, children explored their own self-control in mixing paint and playing Red Light, Green Light. Experimenting with the paint sparked discussion of how much is too much of one color or another. But the task of relating this to *The Lorax* proved a bit advanced for many of the children, at least at first. The story itself, while somewhat long and complicated for this age group, provided the children with an imaginary situation that later became a focus on how much snack was too much and how much time to wait for a turn is reasonable and “fair.”

In reading *The Lorax*, children wrestled with the concept of one animal being happy at the expense of others: “The Once-ler, he didn’t know that they [the trees] were all going to be cut down. I wanted the factory and the forest. The Lorax would be happy; but the Once-ler wanted the trees.” Was it possible that they could both be happy at the same time? One child thought, “No, they can’t. Sometimes it’s okay to cut down trees—if you can make something out of a tree. You can’t cut down a tree for nothing.”

Another child reflected on her understanding of this idea while relating it to her own experiences: “My favorite tree [was] cut down. The flower tree. It was right next to the car, and it was really close, but Mommy was allergic, so we cut it down. She liked the flower tree, but it made her sick.” Children were stretching their thoughts about moderation and about how situations warrant action in some instances that we otherwise would not advocate.

One child reassessed *The Lorax* after reflecting on personal experience and stated her opinion: “They would be happy if some of the trees were cut down.” Another child, taken aback that all the trees were gone, said, “There’s just stumps everywhere!” Later, while drawing about the story, this child drew only trees, as if to value the trees over the Once-ler’s product from the tree.⁷

LESSON 3A. BEING HAPPY WITH ENOUGH VERSUS WANTING MORE

Storybook: Dr. Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle*

Materials: Large building blocks (not Legos)

Goals:

1. Children will show that they understand the vocabulary of comparison and moderation (“too little,” “enough/happy with,” “too much”).
2. Children will identify a time when seeking *more* can have negative consequences, both for the person seeking and for other people.

Opening Game: Building a Tower from Blocks, Part I

Tell the children that they’re going to read a book about Yertle, who built a tower of turtles. But first, they are going to build their own towers. Break the children into pairs or groups, and have each build a tower. As they work, introduce terms of moderation, asking questions such as these:

- Is your tower too short?
- Is your tower high enough?
- Are you happy with your tower?
- Is your tower too high?

Ideally, the children will start competing (this may take some prompting) and build to the point that towers start falling over. At this point ask:

- Do you think your tower was too high? What should you do differently?

As children state positions, use the opportunity to practice Rule 3, “we respond,” prompting their group mates to respond with their ideas.

Story

In reading, be sure to stress terms of moderation: “plenty,” “too small,” “too low,” “enough,” “higher,” “new,” “more.” Along the way, ask questions such as these:

- “I’d be ruler of all I could see!” → Does Yertle *really* not have enough?
- Cow/mule/house → Will Yertle be happy? Will the other turtles be happy?

- “How long must we stand here?” → What do you think Yertle will say to Mack?
- Trees/birds/bees → Do you think Yertle’s throne is too high?
- “NOTHING, that’s higher than me!” → Is Yertle happy? What kind of character is he?
- End → Do you think Yertle is happy now? Why or why not?

Closing Game: Building a Tower from Blocks, Part II

Back to the blocks. This time everyone builds a tower together. As they work, engage them in conversation with questions such as these:

- How high should we make the tower?
- How high would Yertle want the tower?
- Are you happy with a tower this high?

If children disagree with each other, encourage them to give reasons for their ideas.

LESSON 3B. TOO MANY COOKIES?

Storybook: Arnold Lobel, “Cookies,” from *Frog and Toad Together*

Materials: “River,” different-colored paints, cups for mixing, something to stir paint, many (small) paper plates, brushes

Goals:

1. Children will use the vocabulary of comparison and moderation during a hands-on activity, identifying too much, too little, and just right.
2. Children will reflect an understanding of the term “willpower.”

In this activity, we will reinforce the idea of moderation introduced last time by coming at it from another two angles: mixing colors and food. We will also introduce the idea of willpower, which will be picked up by the following lesson on self-control.

Game: Mixing Paint

Give each child a cup and something to use for stirring. Children may then request paint in different colors from the teacher. Give it to them in different amounts. As you do, ask:

- Is this too little <color>?
- Is this too much <color>?
- Is this just right?

The point is to reinforce a vocabulary of “mean,” “deficiency,” and “excess.” It is also a chance to practice Rule 2, “we think,” as they figure out which colors they need and try to predict what will happen. Tell them:

- *Think* what you need.
- *Think* about what will happen.

When done, set aside the paint for later.

Story

This story combines ideas of moderation and self-control. Encourage mini discussions during the story by using the river. While reading, use questions such as the following. With questions marked (R), use the river to have children literally take sides.

- “We will soon be sick” → (R): Do you think they *should* stop eating cookies now? Then follow up with: Why do you think that? Do you think they *will* stop? (This is a chance to talk about too many, too few, the right amount.)
- “One very last cookie” → (R): Do you think they *will* stop eating cookies?
- “We need willpower” → Do you know what “willpower” means?
- After tying the string → (R): Do you think they *want* to eat more cookies? (If we take this to be real internal conflict, there is a sense in which they do and do not want to eat more cookies. Use discussion to distinguish these ideas.)
- End → (R): Can they *really* have lots of willpower if they don’t have any cookies? What kind of characters are Frog and Toad here?

Art Project: Paint a Perfect Meal

Bring back the mixed paints, give each child a paper plate, and ask them to paint as many cookies as they think is just right for them. Whenever they finish painting one plate, offer them another. Let this continue as long as the children want it to. As they work, ask questions such as these:

- What kind of cookie are you painting?
- What do you think will happen if you eat that many cookies?
- Are you using willpower if you eat so many cookies it makes you sick?

LESSON 3C. SELF-CONTROL AND FEAR

Storybook: Mike McClintock, *A Fly Went By*

Materials: Floor space for playing Red Light, Green Light; paper; drawing supplies

Goal: Children will demonstrate an understanding of willpower and self-control by identifying at least one example from the story, activity, or their own lives.

In this lesson, children are introduced to the idea of self-control and apply it to their own experience. The lesson focuses on the ability to stop when you want to stop and go when you want to go, and it requires children to think about their control over their own actions. This will likely be heavy on meta-cognition (thinking about thinking) and light on disagreement.

Game: (A Variation on) Red Light, Green Light

Explain the rules: Everyone starts at one side of the room. When the light keeper says “green light,” everyone goes forward. When the light keeper says “red light,” everyone must freeze. Anyone who does not freeze must sit down and stay down. The game continues until only one person is left standing. When children mess up and have to sit down, say:

- You have to use more self-control.

When children do well and freeze on command, say:

- You are using good self-control.

By removing the normal “race” element from the game, this version focuses on the use of self-control rather than just being first to the finish line. This will help children practice Rule 1, “we listen.” Periodically, remind them to “listen,” and praise them when they listen well.

Story

Both Aristotle and the Stoics stress the importance of responding rationally to our environments. This requires moderating or completely eliminating emotional knee-jerk reactions. *A Fly Went By* depicts a group of animals that fail to do either as they are swept away by their circumstances. The story provides a somewhat more lifelike scenario than the game for thinking about

self-control. During reading, ask questions such as the following, but be sure to keep things moving quickly:

- Page 5 → What do you think the fly is trying to get away from?
- Page 7 → Why do you think the frog is following the fly?
- Page 9 → Why do you think the frog is trying to get away?
- Page 13 → Is the cat using self-control here?
- Page 21 → Do you think the boy's plan will work?
- Page 25 → Do you think the pig wants to bite the dog?
- Page 27 → Is anyone here using self-control?
- Page 41 → Do you think the man is the one who made this all happen?
- Page 50 → What do you think is making everyone run?
- Page 53 → Now what do you think the boy will do? Will it work?
- End → Were the animals using self-control? Was it hard for them to use self-control?

Art Project: Draw a Time You Used Self-Control

This will require a fair deal of metacognition. If children struggle to come up with something, help them via questions such as these:

- Can you think of a time you wanted to do something that you weren't supposed to do?
- Can you think of something that was hard for you to do?

It would also help for teachers to model responses by participating in the art project. As children work, engage them in discussion to see how they connect self-control to their own experience.

LESSON 3D. SELF-CONTROL AND ANGER

Storybook: Mercer Mayer, *I Was So Mad*

Materials: Paper, drawing supplies

Goal: Children will generalize their understanding of self-control by applying it to controlling their anger.

In this lesson, children will expand their concept of the use of self-control by applying it to situations of anger. Help children to go beyond their initial reactions and think about whether they are, in fact, acting for the best and whether anger is an appropriate response.

Opposite Game

This is a variation on Simon Says. The leader gives verbal instructions and acts them out, but everyone else must do the opposite. Possible commands include the following:

- Put your hands up high! / Put your hands down low!
- Open your eyes! / Close your eyes!
- Make a lot of noise! / Be really quiet!

This provides another chance to practice self-control. When children mess up, remind them to “use more self-control.” When they get it right, praise them for “good self-control.” The game goes beyond Red Light, Green Light, however, in that the mixed signals require not just careful listening but also thinking. As you go, remind them of the “listening” and “thinking” rules.

Story

This story shows a young critter getting into mischief, being repeatedly told to stop doing what he’s doing, and getting mad as a result. While the protagonist sees his actions as fun or even helpful, he fails to see how they affect other people. In most instances, a moment’s thought would show why these actions aren’t the best idea. But it still takes self-control for him not to respond with anger to people telling him what to do.

- Frogs, dollhouse, and sheets → Each act is fun but annoys others. Ask questions such as these:
 - Does this look like fun?
 - Why won’t the grown-ups let him do this?
 - Would you get mad if someone told you to stop doing this?
 - Is the little critter using self-control?
- Garden and decorating house → Each act seems helpful but isn’t. Ask questions such as these:
 - Is the little critter being helpful?
 - Why doesn’t his grandpa let him do this?
- Sandbox and slide → Have you ever been so mad you didn’t want to play?
- Eggs and goldfish → How do you think the little critter feels now?
- Cookies → Is he being too mad? Is running away a good idea?
- Friends → Do you think he will stay mad or go play with his friends?
- End → Do you think the little critter had much self-control?

Art Project: Draw a Time You Were Mad

Have children apply the story to their own experience by drawing a time they got mad and what they did. As they work, engage them in conversations with questions such as these:

- What’s happening in your picture?
- What made you mad?
- Did you use self-control?
- How did it make you feel?
- What’s a better way to respond when this happens?

NOTES

1. The claim here is that in dialogues such as *Protagoras*, Plato’s character Socrates defends this position. Whether the historical Socrates subscribed to such a view is complicated insofar as (a) he himself never wrote anything down; (b) those dialogues of Plato that scholars take to represent Socrates’s thought mostly end in perplexity; and (c) in these same dialogues, Socrates repeated claims that he lacked moral knowledge. That said, there are certain ideas that he flirts with, coming back to them in various works. In calling the current idea “Socratic,” this is all we mean.

2. Plato argues for the divided soul in book 4 of *Republic* (435a–441c); his account of *sōphrosunē* is spread throughout the work, but see especially 441c–444a.

3. Following the Latin version of these terms, philosophers sometimes refer to *akrasia* and *enkrasia* as “incontinence” and “continence.” See EN 7.1–3 for discussion.

4. Among other things, the Stoics were Pantheists of a sort who identified Zeus with the soul of the world. And as Seneca, tutor to the young Emperor Nero, put it: The gods, like the Spartans, “demand more labor from those children for whom they have stronger hope” (Seneca, *On Providence* 4). This explains why Hercules, a son of Zeus, spent his life engaged in “labors.” Such “soul-building” arguments are central to the Stoics’ explanation of why an all-powerful, all-good god would permit evil and suffering to exist in the world.

5. For those wishing to read further on the *sōphrosunē*, the ancient literature is extensive. Plato’s Socratic dialogue *Charmides* is dedicated to an (unsuccessful) attempt to define this virtue. Another of Plato’s Socratic dialogues, *Protagoras*, confronts the question of whether virtue may be taught (again, without reaching any conclusion). Along the way, Socrates explores the ideas that all virtues are a form of knowledge (329b–334c; 349a–351a) and that weakness of will is impossible (351b–362a).

Aristotle discusses *sōphrosunē* under the guise of what we would call “moderation” at EN 3.10–12. Issues of “self-control” come to the fore in EN 7, as Aristotle takes a deeper dive and defends the possibility of weakness of will against Socratic discussions such as *Protagoras*. EN 7.1–3 is the most useful portion. The *Handbook* of Epictetus is a useful starting point for Stoic discussions of temperance and ethical theory generally.

6. See Fred M. Rogers, “What Do You Do with the Mad That You Feel?” *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, PBS Kids, 1968, <http://pbskids.org/rogers/songLyricsWhatDoYouDo.html>.

7. *The Lorax* is a rich and complex work tying together many different philosophical questions. It provided a springboard for several days’ discussion at Hume House CDC. Because of its scope, however, it also does not fit the rhythm of our standard lesson arc. We have thus not included it in what follows. That said, it makes a fantastic “capstone” either at the end of the moderation lesson, the end of the Ancient Ethics sequence, or the end of the whole curriculum. For young audiences, we suggest spreading reading across multiple days.

Chapter 7

Lesson 4: Friendship

ARISTOTLE ON FRIENDSHIP

How many friends do you have, really? Judging by a typical Facebook account, most people have hundreds or thousands. But, if we set the standard for friendship at a simple click and the occasional status update, we're missing out on a rich part of human experience.

Perhaps friends are people we enjoy interacting with on a regular, one-on-one basis. If that's the case, are coworkers or fellow students your friends? Are just the ones you *like* interacting with at work or school your friends? How many of these people do you see outside of work or school? How many would you invite to your wedding? How many would come?

And then there are our social circles: those groups of people that we get together with when we go out. Are our real friends the ones we choose to spend our free time with, the ones we look to when we want to have fun? Perhaps. But many such relationships are the quickest to fall by the wayside as people start families or move to new cities.

Perhaps, then, it is endurance that shows who our real friends are: those relationships that will last no matter how circumstances change. If that's true, are our family members our true friends? As with death and taxes, our family will always be there. How many of us would even think of family members as friends in the first place?

Given that most of us consider friendship an important part of life, we're left with a dilemma: We all want to have friends, and we all want those friendships to be real, but it turns out that it's hard to say what a "real friend" might be. Before we can say how many real friends we have, we need to figure out what we're even talking about.

One approach would be to split “friend” into categories. We could do this by context: school friends, work friends, Facebook friends, going-out friends, girlfriends, boyfriends. We could do this by standing: acquaintances versus close friends, new friends versus old friends. But it’s hard to see when such a process would stop. What’s worse, all it accomplishes is to restate the question, Which *categories* are our real friends?

Aristotle saw friendship as such an important part of the good life that he dedicated two books of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to it (EN 8–9). “Human beings,” after all, “are a political animal” (EN 9.9). We naturally form relationships with each other, and living well, at least in part, requires us to form good relationships. Rather than look to context or standing, Aristotle suggests we categorize friendships by what they are based on. He narrows this down to three possible bases: pleasure, utility, and virtue (EN 8.2–3).

Friendships based on pleasure, he suggests, are common among the young and tend to be short-lived. If what we have in common with our “going-out friends” is going out, there’s little reason to stay in touch once we start a family or move to another city. While a friendship based on utility or “usefulness” may sound odd, at work we often say things like, “I’ve got a friend in IT who can take care of that.” Aristotle claims that such friendships are common among older people but tend to last only so long as we get use out of them.

The trouble with both sorts of friendship is that what we ultimately care about is not the other person but what we get from him or her, whether that be pleasure or utility. Ideally, this will be a two-way street, and each friend gets pleasure or utility from the other.

Aristotle goes further and argues that real friendship requires each friend to love the other. While most people would agree, what does this actually mean? What exactly is the “me” that others should love? If we say my personality, that may simply mean that people enjoy being around me. In this case, they value me for pleasure. If we say my perspectives, that may mean that I help them see the world differently or I help advance projects they care about. In this case, they value me for utility.

Some of us may say that the truest form of friendship is unconditional: My real friends love me just because. Many people in our culture today find this take to be the highest form of friendship. Aristotle, however, finds the idea to be incoherent: Only *good* things are worthy of love, so if someone loves me, it must be insofar as I am good. And with this, we arrive at virtue.

In broad terms, ancient ethics focuses on how to live well, while modern ethics focuses on how to identify morally correct actions. When it comes to questions of friendship, the distinction makes a difference: Aristotle is not saying that we only love people who perform morally correct actions. He is saying that we only love people who excel at being people. In more modern terms, if someone loves me for me, it is my *character* that they love. The

Greek term for “virtue,” *arete*, means “excellence,” which was spelled out in terms of bravery, wisdom, moderation, justice, and so on.

While virtuous people tend to perform morally correct actions, it is not the action alone that Aristotle cares about. People who give to charity for a tax write-off or volunteer in homeless shelters because it looks good on résumés perform morally correct actions. Yet, we would not go out of our way to commend their character. At best, such actions may provide a first step toward a change of heart: A prep-school student may, at first, volunteer because doing so will help her get into college, but interacting with homeless people may, over time, help her develop a sense of compassion. Such a change of heart, however, raises a further puzzle.

According to Aristotle, virtues are ultimately habits that are developed through practice. A person is only brave, wise, moderate, or just when he unthinkingly responds to circumstances bravely, wisely, moderately, and justly through a kind of second nature. This takes time. Years. Young people, whose character is still being formed, are works in progress. They are incapable of virtue in Aristotle’s sense. Because of this, Aristotle concludes, young people are also incapable of having real friendships.

This will likely strike most of us as ridiculous. If a theory says that young people (maybe anyone under thirty) can’t have real friends, our first response is to say that the theory is flawed. But if we give Aristotle’s idea a chance, there might be *something* here. The friendships that last the longest, those that we would look back on fondly from our deathbeds, are likely to be the ones in which individuals helped each other grow as people. Such relationships are precious. They also find a natural home in educational contexts, as we all have favorite teachers who, in retrospect, helped us become our better selves.¹

As for our initial question, “How many (real) friends do you have?” Aristotle’s answer would be: precious few. If he’s right that what really matters in life is character, not fun times or getting stuff done at work, we’d do well to take his ideas seriously.

So how does all this translate into a pre-K context? Our goal should *not* be to teach children Aristotle’s three categories of friends. After all, Aristotle may be wrong! What he does give us, though, is a useful way of framing the questions: What is it that you value in your friends? Is it what you get from them or their character? What is it that you get from your friends? What do your friends get from you? What does character look like to a four-year-old? Given Aristotle’s views about virtue and the young, is what we should love in children their capacity to develop their character, to become virtuous?

We might think that there is a way to be virtuous *as a child*, yet at least part of that should be future oriented: Part of what it is to excel as a child is to be developing into an excellent adult. This raises a further set of concerns: What influence do friends have on each other? Are your friends

helping you become your best self? Are you helping your friends become their best selves? Whatever the right answers to these questions end up being, Aristotle surely was right that friendship is an important part of human life. It is thus well worth our while to get children thinking about such issues as early as possible.

Putting all this into terms young children can use, we can distinguish between pleasure and utility by talking about friends who are “fun” to be with versus those who “help” do something. We can get individual children to think about how their friends are fun or helpful for them. We can, in turn, get individual children to think about how they are fun or helpful for their friends. As for friendships helping children develop virtue, previous lessons have focused on particular “characters” in stories. We now push into the somewhat more abstract question of how friends change your character in terms of habits, likes, and so on.²

Discussion Questions for Teachers

1. Do you have any friends that you just stopped thinking about? What happened? In Aristotle’s terms, what was that friendship based on?
2. Can you think of times, either in your own life or in the lives of children you work with, when one friend changed the character of another? Was this for the best?
3. What do you do in your day-to-day life to cultivate your friendships? In Aristotle’s terms, do you care about your friends themselves or simply what you get from them?

FRIENDSHIPS IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

In contrast to some other areas of cognitive development that are just emerging, preschool children know a lot about friendship. Aristotle narrows down the properties of friendship to three categories: pleasure, utility, and virtue (EN 8.2–3).

Friendships based on pleasure are fun; those based on utility are instrumental for the child, used to accomplish some self-serving end. For the adult, that end might be rides to town; for a child, it might be the safety and security of a delighted greeting on arriving at preschool or the guaranteed sharing of a toy at recess.

Friendships based on virtue rest on habits of morally correct action, such as bravery, sharing goods, or helping others. Aristotle doubts that children

can achieve this, but children actually make sophisticated judgments about their friends.

Researchers today have found that preschool children have rich, complex, and shifting friendship patterns. This is a well-developed area and full of examples for P4C. Friendships are traditionally studied in two ways: direct observation and peer nomination.

In *observation studies*, you watch children carefully over a period of time and note whom they spend time with, the valence of their interactions, and their loyalty. Do they consistently come to the aid of particular others? Do they save a seat at circle time for a friend? Do they ask incessantly about the whereabouts of certain absent peers?

Cluster analyses show patterns formed by dyads and small groups over time. Kathryn A. Kerns (2000) studied fifty pairs of best friends, ages three to five, and found that 66 percent of the dyads were harmonious, positive, and interacted a lot during play; constructed scenarios together; were very quick to respond to each other; and chose each other first, time and again. Researchers estimate that 90 percent of preschool children can name a close friend (Asher and Renshaw 1981). The friendships are play based, rooted in the action and reaction of a comfortable partner and thus fill Aristotle's functions of pleasure and utility. Even preschoolers know a lot about being a friend.

Peer nomination studies take many forms. But, put simply, children are interviewed one at a time, shown images of their peers, and then asked a series of questions: Who would you like to play with the most? The least? Who is your friend? Who is not your friend? Who would you like to have come to your house? Who sometimes hurts others? Typically, teachers are also asked these questions, and sometimes parents are asked to comment on class members, as well. Researchers then arrive at a consensus about a child's sociometric or friend-nominated status. It's a sort of data-based popularity contest.

Sociometrics consistently show that mutual friendship is an important connection in preschoolers' lives. Lindsey (2002), in a study of 166 children, ages three to six, found that 73 percent had at least one positive, bidirectional friendship. Children with at least one friend were seen by teachers and peers as more socially competent and less aggressive. Friendship enriches lives.

It's a gradual process, but they're learning how to be friends; children with a mutual friend at age three are rated as more popular and socially competent two years later. This is a *really* long time in preschool life. At around four years of age, children have sharing expectations that match the past sharing behaviors of their partners; they are kinder to children who've shared in the past. By age five, children's own sharing and their expectations of what their partners will do are nearly exactly matched (Paulus and Moore 2014). They

have come to a rudimentary moral judgment of the other. In P4C, we can expect complex and sophisticated discussions of friendship.

TEACHER REFLECTION

As stated previously, our school rules are “be safe, and be a good friend.” While we use the term “friend” as a description of all the children, the term was clarified with these activities and discussions. We asked children to draw their friend and what they like doing together. In narrating their creations, children said things like, “Me and Jack using shovels” and “Me and Theo at the football game.” Although they liked doing different things together, it seemed like it was the “together” part that was more important than the thing they were doing.

As often happens in preschool, children like to play different things but sometimes do not recognize that friends may have alternative ideas. This can lead to the all-too-common phrase “He’s not my friend.” Yet, when we asked the children to consider what their friends drew, they came to understand that a friend may want to play something different at times and that this does not necessarily lead to children being “unfriended.” By realizing a degree of independence in their relationships, children created a more nuanced vision of what it means to be a “friend.”

Another child said, “This is me and Sophia. I am giving her a flower, and I am giving my baby sister a flower, too.” Children note that friends give things to each other. “When I take care of Sophia and my little sister, I feel ‘I love you’ in my heart.” They recognize that friendship causes feelings of joy and appreciation for another person. What better way to express what being a friend means! Again, we see how the art unleashes deep thoughts for children. It also reinforces concepts children can take into new relationships and experiences: Being a good friend benefits both people, and regarding another as a friend often leads to mutual happiness.

Teachers took the children’s conclusions to heart and made concerted efforts to bind children together in the classroom by encouraging them to work together on projects, at clean-up time, and so on. They also planned more collaborative activities: making friendship portraits and self-portraits, noticing things about our friends that make us happy or sad.

In time, this sparked the idea for a board where we notice similarities in each other. This has become our “twinning board.” The new addition to our school is a place where we post pictures of children, teachers, parents, those who dress similarly, those who have similar experiences (like losing a tooth), and those who share interests (like following the same team). All these efforts

have resulted in a deeper connection to our positive behavior support plans schoolwide.

LESSON 4A. FUN FRIENDS VERSUS HELPFUL FRIENDS

Storybook: Julia Donaldson, *Sharing a Shell*

Materials: Blindfolds, Mr. Potato Head sets (enough for groups of two or three), model school (e.g., a piece of cardboard), clay, beads, found items, and so on

Goals:

1. Children will name two different reasons for having friends.
2. Children will identify, or agree on, one thing they can do to be a good friend.

In this lesson, children will reflect on different reasons for having friends. Help children see fun and help as two distinct ideas. Children will, ideally, reflect on what they bring to friendships.

Game: Blindfolded Mr. Potato Head

Put children into pairs or groups of three if necessary. For each group, one child is given an empty Mr. Potato Head. The other child/children are blindfolded and given the face pieces. The child who can see gives verbal instructions to the others on how to assemble the face. Multiple groups may do this at once. While the children play, ask questions such as these:

- Is your friend being helpful? How?
- If your friend fun to play with? Why?

Time permitting, let children switch roles and start over. Among other things, this will give children a chance to practice the “listening” rule.

Story

This story illustrates a group of sea life in a symbiotic relationship. They originally come together because they are mutually helpful, but this relationship develops as they have fun romping, rollicking, and rocketing around a rock pool. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “Or me.” → Are the other animals being helpful? Are they being good friends?
- “Look! A blob” → Is the crab being a good friend?
- “Stinging the fish on the nose!” → Wow! Is the blob helping? Is he a good friend?
- “Romping” → Are they friends? How can you tell?
- “Look! A brush thing” → Are the crab and the blob being good friends to the brush thing?
- “I love doing housework.” → What do you think will happen next?
- “Rollicking” → Are they all friends now? Why? Are they helping or having fun?
- “Crab in the cup, Blob on the tub” → Now no one is having fun. Are they all still friends?
- “Shall we share?” → What do you think will happen?
- “Rocketing” → Do you think they are friends now? Why?

Art Project: What Will You Bring to School?

Tell the children that they are going to bring things to their school. Give them each a piece of clay and other items to decorate. Have them each “think” first about what they will bring to their friends at school. As they work, engage them in conversation through questions such as these:

- What are you making?
- Is it useful?
- Is it fun?

When they are finished with their creations, attach all of them to “the school.” Have each child explain his or her contribution as they attach them.

LESSON 4B. ONE-SIDED FRIENDSHIP

Storybook: Jon J. Muth, “Uncle Ry and the Moon,” from *Zen Shorts*

Materials: “River,” paper, drawing supplies

Goal: Children will question the mutuality of friendship by participating in a discussion of good and bad friends.

In this lesson, children will discuss whether friendship is possible if only one person is being fun or helpful. The goal is not to reach a consensus but to help children see what the problem is, to think through it via the story, and to

apply it to their own lives in the art project. The more civil disagreement and on-point reasons given for positions, the better.

Game: Charades—Act Out Something Nice You’ve Done for a Friend

Sitting in a circle, ask each child to think of something nice they have done for someone. Each child then takes a turn acting it out while everyone else guesses what the child is doing. Periodically ask questions such as these:

- Was that helpful? Was it fun? What kind of character were you showing?
- How did it make your friend feel?
- How did it make you feel?

Also, at the appropriate points, emphasize:

- You’re being a good friend.

You can use this to practice the “thinking” rule. As children are concentrating, draw attention to the fact that they are thinking. If they are stuck, encourage them to “think.”

Story

The picture book *Zen Shorts* includes three embedded Zen koans. Whatever their original purpose within Buddhism, koans are also useful to us for sparking discussion. Read only the four-page story “Uncle Ry and the Moon,” about a robber racoon who breaks into a house and a panda, Uncle Ry, who gives the racoon his robe but laments the fact that he can’t give him the moon. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- First page → What is the racoon going to do? Would you say “hello” to a robber? What kind of character is the racoon?
- Second page → Why did Ry give the robber his robe? Is Ry being a good friend to the robber?
- Third page → Is the robber being helpful? Is the robber being a good friend to Ry?
- Fourth page → Were Uncle Ry and the robber friends? Can you be a friend to someone who is not a friend to you? (Use the river for this.)

If all goes well, there should be more and more disagreement as the story progresses. Get children to disagree and give reasons for their positions.

Encourage them to think of examples from their own experience. This will transition into the final stage.

Art Project: Draw a Good Friend and a Bad Friend

This will allow children to apply these ideas to their own lives. As they work, engage them with questions such as these:

- What are these two doing?
- Are they both friends?
- Which one would you rather be? Why?

LESSON 4C. DO FRIENDS CHANGE YOU?

Storybook: Leo Lionni, *Little Blue and Little Yellow*

Materials: “River,” one large piece of paper for each group of two or three children, one cup of paint and brush per child

Goal: Children will reflect on how friends change each other and apply this to their own lives.

River Game: What’s Your Favorite Thing to Do?

Lay the “river” out on the floor. Ask one child at a time his or her favorite thing to do. To keep it interesting, specify for different children: at school, at home, on the playground, when pretending, and so on. The child who answers stands on one side of the river; everyone who also agrees stands on that side, and everyone who disagrees stands on the other side. Once children are divided, ask them questions such as these:

- Are you friends because you have fun doing the same thing?
- Can you be friends if you don’t both have fun doing the same thing?
- If you tried <activity> because your friend likes it, would you start liking it, too?

Children’s favorites will be useful during the story and art project, so remember what they say.

Story

In this psychedelic tale, little blue and little yellow hug so tight they become green. After this, their parents don't recognize them. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- "Hide-and-seek" → Can you see where little blue and little yellow are? (Point out if any of your children's favorite things to do come up in the book.)
- "But little blue went out to look" → Was that smart?
- "Happily they hugged each other" → What's happening?
- "They climbed a mountain" → Are they being brave? (You might relate this back to the *Frog and Toad* story "Dragons and Giants.")
- "And papa and mama yellow said" → Why don't their parents recognize them? Have these friends changed each other? Are they a new character? How?
- "Until they were all tears" → Have you ever cried that much? What will happen now?
- End → If your favorite color hugged your friend's favorite color, what would happen? Would you have a new favorite color? Who wants to do some painting! (Transition to the art project.)

Art Project: Paint What You Like Doing with Your Friends

Give each child a cup of paint in his or her favorite color. Put children into groups of two or three; make sure the colors for each group don't match. If possible, also group children with others who have expressed different favorite activities at the start. Basically, set the stage for children to change each other. Then give each pair/group a large sheet of paper and ask them to paint "what you like doing with your friends." As they work, ask questions such as these:

- What are you all doing in the picture?
- Will you start liking new things because of your friend?
- (If they start mixing paint) What happened? Has your friend changed you? Are you a new character?

Young children typically don't think symbolically, but they do identify with favorite colors, activities, and the like. By focusing on these concrete externals, children can start thinking about less tangible aspects of character.

LESSON 4D. THE IMPORTANT THING ABOUT A FRIEND

Storybook: Margaret Wise Brown, *The Important Book*

Materials: “River,” colored pencils, one piece of paper for each child with “The important thing about a friend is . . .” written across the top

Goal: Children will identify defining characteristics of a friend.

At this point, we have introduced a lot of ideas: fun friends, helpful friends, one-sided friends, friends changing each other. Here we want to see what’s stuck. Children can start moving beyond particular cases and make general claims about what they have learned about friendship via the phrase “The important thing about a friend is . . .”

Game/Story

Use the river during reading. *The Important Book* lists characteristics of different things and picks out which are important. Some of these are clear: The important thing about a spoon is that you eat with it. Some of them aren’t: The important thing about an apple is that it is round. After each page, have children take sides on the river, asking questions like these:

- Do you agree or disagree that the important thing about X is Y?
- (If they disagree) What *is* the important thing about X?

Once they have taken sides, you can ask them to give reasons to each other. If the opportunity arises, you can ask them questions such as these:

- Is that fun?
- Is that useful or helpful?

This may take a while, so feel free to skip pages strategically. When you get to the last page, “You are you,” ask them what that means.

Art Project: Friend Book

Tell the children that they’re going to make their own “important book” about friends. Give each child a paper and pencils, and ask them to draw what the important thing about a friend is.

NOTES

1. Aristotle seems uninterested in analyzing *different* types of friendships between children. Instead, he lumps them all under “pleasure” and focuses on how adults may help shape the character of children (EN 8.11, 12, 14; 9.7). While this shows us Aristotle at his least child-centered point, he does mention that, when virtuous people become friends, their relationship allows them to become *more* virtuous (EN 9.9, 12). We may thus go beyond Aristotle’s writings and carve out a broadly “Aristotelian” category of friendships based on cultivating virtue, which could be applied even to young children.

2. Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in EN 8–9 acts as a capstone for the discussion of virtue that came before; only after clarifying what the virtuous/excellent individual looks like can Aristotle make a meaningful argument that only virtuous people can be true friends. For those looking to read further, these books provide a rich resource.

The crux comes at EN 8.1–4. In EN 8.1–2, Aristotle surveys common beliefs about friendship and teases out puzzles. In EN 8.3–4, Aristotle responds by laying out his three bases for friendship. The rest of the two books use these bases to resolve a range of puzzles: friendship in political systems (8.10–11), friendship in families (7.12), problems arising between friends (8.13–14; 9.1–3), self-love as a form of friendship (9.4, 8), and why/how many friends are needed (9.9–12). These discussions are relatively independent, so readers can pick and choose, provided they start with EN 8.1–4.

Part III

TEACHING MODERN ETHICS

Up to this point, we have explored ancient ethics with its focuses on agents: issues of character, virtue, what makes a good life. While Aristotle and friends care about correct action, they take for granted that in most cases the “right” thing to do would be fairly obvious. Rather than worry about how to identify the right, they are more concerned with figuring out how to be the kind of person who would perform the right action. While the two concerns are not mutually exclusive, ancient ethics still tends to be “agent centered.”

Modern (in the sense of postmedieval) philosophers, by contrast, have taken an “act-centered” approach, placing concerns for character on the back burner in an effort to determine general criteria by which we can judge whether actions are morally right or wrong. The main debate in ethical theory for the last century and a half has been between consequentialists, who argue that an act is right or wrong based *only* on its consequences, and nonconsequentialists, who, as you may guess, argue that we must take into account more than just consequences.

These positions are fleshed out by John Stuart Mill, who argued that an act is right insofar as it contributes to the greatest overall happiness (consequentialism), and Immanuel Kant, who argued that an act is right insofar as it is performed with the right intention, which he identified as respect for rational beings and a sense of duty to universal principles (nonconsequentialism). We explore Mill’s ideas in Lesson 5 and Kant’s in Lesson 6. Before we do, however, this tidy historical overview needs to be nuanced on a few fronts.

First, you may wonder why we have skipped the roughly two thousand years between the Hellenistic schools and Kant. Wasn’t there anyone doing ethics during the middle ages? Of course there was. But the present work is intended, at least in part, for secular schools, and most medieval ethical thought is caught up in questions of how to live one’s life within the

Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Our main, perhaps somewhat cowardly, reason for not devoting lessons to medieval ethical thought is simply that doing so would open a can of worms in the context of early childhood education today.

A somewhat more substantial reason for passing over this period is that medieval ethics is centrally concerned with the ideas that we have already laid out. The Abrahamic faiths did not *replace* classical Greek ethical theories; they *adopted* them as frameworks for engaging their respective holy books and interpretive traditions. When it comes to ethical theory, what really divides individual thinkers is not so much their faiths but whether they subscribe primarily to Plato or primarily to Aristotle.

In the Latin-speaking West, the early Middle Ages extended from roughly the fourth to the twelfth centuries and were dominated by Platonic ethical ideas, as figures such as Augustine, Boethius, and Eriugena posited a kind of intellectual contemplation as the highest form of human happiness.

By the middle of this period, the Arabic-speaking world, which extended from the Middle East to Spain, was coming into its own. This included both Islamic thinkers, such as Ibn-Sina and Ibn-Rushd (a.k.a. Avicenna and Averroes), and Jewish thinkers, such as Moses Ben Maimon (a.k.a. Maimonides), who were busily trying to reconcile what they saw as the central ideas from Plato and Aristotle with their own faith traditions.

What the Arabic world had, and the Christian West did not, was the complete works of Aristotle, which they commented on at length. All this started to change around the twelfth century, when Aristotle was reintroduced to the West via these Arabic thinkers. This fusion of ideas and the new craze for Aristotle sparked the outpouring of thought we now call the “High Middle Ages” with figures such as Thomas Aquinas, who referred to Aristotle as “The Philosopher” and Averroes as “The Commentator.”

This “interfaith dialogue” provides a model we would do well to imitate today. From the standpoint of ethical theory, though, the excitement is in the details, not the big ideas. Getting a handle on what is new in medieval thought requires a background understanding of Greek philosophers, Abrahamic religions, and world history that makes most undergraduates’ heads spin. Your typical four-year-old just isn’t there yet.

The second complication to the tidy history we’ve laid out is that the agent- versus act-centered distinction does not always fit very well. These are, of course, matters of *focus* and so need not be mutually exclusive. Still, there are times when ancient and medieval thinkers, in trying to work out how to live well, have produced conceptual resources that modern thinkers have repurposed as criteria for judging the rightness and wrongness of actions. We make use of two examples of this in what follows.

The first and most obvious connection is between the ancient hedonism of Epicurus, who taught that the happy *life* consists of pleasure, which he understood as the absence of pain, and the modern hedonism of Mill, who used pleasure and pain as criteria for judging *actions*. While the two have slightly different ideas about what constitutes pleasure, their thought is largely compatible. One of Lesson 5's arcs thus builds on Epicurus's strategy for maximizing pleasure by minimizing desire.

A second but less widely acknowledged connection is between Augustine and Kant. In working out how we may obtain happiness, Augustine argued that the first step is a rightly ordered will, which he understood as valuing things according to their actual worth: preferring rational people to things and God to everything else. Kant starts from the same basic hierarchy (things, people, God) but clumps God and other people together and uses the remaining thing/person dichotomy to ground ideas of respect and duty, which serve as his criteria for right action. We explore these ideas in Lesson 6.

The third and final complication to our tidy historical account is that, over the last few decades, ancient, agent-centered ethics have come back into style. This turn of events results, in part, from the Kant/Mill debate having gotten a bit silly: After a century and a half, philosophers' thought experiments involving Nazis, runaway trains, and evil neuroscientists have started to lose their hold on everyday life. As a result, figures such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) have called for a return to virtue ethics to provide a context against which such deliberation can proceed in meaningful ways. At the start of the twenty-first century, Aristotle is once again hip.

Another reason for this return to ancient ideas comes from current feminist theory. While Aristotle's views on women may leave us cringing today, his holistic approach to ethical questions is largely in line with feminist critiques of the "masculine" approaches of Kant and Mill, which privilege abstract principles over concrete relationships. Starting in the 1980s with Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on moral development, feminist theorists have shifted our focus away from the abstract and onto the particular, using categories of "care" to think about the ethical life. We explore these ideas in Lesson 7.

With this somewhat less tidy, though what we hope to be still manageable, overview in mind, let us now turn to Mill. While the lessons to follow may be used in isolation from one another, they do build on each other. Lesson 5, "Pleasure and the Greater Good," lays out consequentialist ideas that are played against nonconsequentialist ideas in Lesson 6, "Rules and Respect." Lesson 7, "Care," draws on all that came before while focusing on questions arising from the feminist movement.

Chapter 8

Lesson 5: Pleasure and the Greater Good

J. S. MILL AND EPICURUS ON CONSEQUENTIALISM

When Erik Kenyon, one of our authors, was in high school, he had the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., and the National Cathedral. As a young organist, he was swept away by the grandeur of the place; the lavish sculpture; the stained glass; and, of course, the massive pipe organ. Afterward, as he was waxing poetic about all this, his organ teacher looked at him and said, “Okay, but think of all that in terms of food.” While the cathedral is an amazing place, it sports a construction price of \$65 million. In a world where people starve to death every day, isn’t it simply irresponsible to spend that much on a church, however beautiful it might be?

On the other hand, as you might hear read in the cathedral itself, “The poor will always be with you” (Matthew 26:11, Mark 14:7). Setting aside art until all the world’s basic social problems are solved would likely mean the death of art. This is not merely a problem for cathedrals. How many of us have spent money on vacations that we could have donated to relief efforts in the developing world? Yet, unless you are among the top 1 percent of the top 1 percent, even giving *all* your income to relief programs will barely make a dent in world hunger. Surely it is all right for us to enjoy ourselves to some extent. But where do we draw the line?

In discussing bravery in Lesson 2 and temperance in Lesson 3, we explore how to become the kind of person who can withstand obstacles, either external or internal, in pursuit of the greater good. There are times, however, when identifying the greater good becomes difficult. While Aristotle may have useful theories about how to be a brave and moderate person, his virtue ethics are less helpful when it comes to adjudicating competing claims on finite resources.

It is at this point that modern Utilitarianism comes in. The term was made popular by J. S. Mill, who worked out an ethical system around the greatest happiness principle. This is a “hedonist” theory (i.e., one based on pleasure) that holds “that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure” (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 2.2).¹ While this may seem like mere common sense, it is a quite radical claim, which Mill spells out in three ways.

First, when we calculate how much pleasure or pain an act creates, it does not matter *whose* pleasure or pain we are talking about. An egoist puts more worth on his own pleasure when making decisions. An altruist puts more worth on other people’s pleasure. A Utilitarian looks to the overall pleasure of people in general, giving no more weight to his own or others’.

Developmentally, four-year-olds will likely start from considerations of their own pleasure (sadly, many adults do the same). It may thus take some coaxing to get them to think of others—not because they are selfish but because they literally cannot see things from another point of view without coaching. Such situations arise naturally during the day: There are only so many cookies at lunch; only so many people can use a swing at one time. It is a philosophically valid question: *Why* should I share? Mill’s answer: Because your happiness is no more important than anyone else’s.

What’s more, insofar as many animals seem just as capable as humans of feeling pleasure and pain, more recent Utilitarians, such as Peter Singer, have argued that the happiness and suffering of nonhuman animals should also be taken into account as we make decisions about resources, policies, and lifestyles. According to Utilitarians, we are morally obligated to pursue whatever course of action maximizes pleasure and minimizes suffering overall.

Second, according to Mill, not all pleasures are equal. In addition to questions of *quantity*, Mill distinguishes between different levels of *quality* (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 2.4–10). “Lower pleasures” are those we share with other animals. They are immediate, tied up with our bodily senses, and often used up by an individual (e.g., food). “Higher pleasures,” by contrast, involve human beings’ higher capacities for reason, art, and social feeling. All pleasures are good, but anyone who has come to appreciate higher pleasures will see that they are worth more than the lower ones.

That’s not to say that higher and lower pleasures are completely opposed. A cello note might sound pleasant, a piece of cheese might taste good, and a person may look nice. These are all lower pleasures. Yet, this note combined with others in a symphony goes beyond merely striking our ears as pleasant. It is a different *order* of pleasure.

Likewise, it may be nice to look at an attractive person, but it's even better to do so while engaging that person in conversation, perhaps after a concert, over a meal in which a cheese is paired with the right kind of wine. Each part of this whole strikes our bodily senses as pleasant, but the whole is more than the sum of its parts, insofar as this combination (i.e., a date) engages our distinctively human capacities. In this way, higher pleasures may embrace lower pleasures but not vice versa.

This might all seem slightly snobbish (perhaps even speciesist), but higher pleasures have their uses. Since they appeal to the mind and not just the bodily senses, they are often more easily shared. While only a few people may enjoy a given piece of cheese, thousands may fill a concert hall to enjoy a symphony's performance, and millions may take pleasure from a public library. According to Mill, the relative ease with which higher pleasure can be provided to the masses puts a moral obligation on governments to use resources accordingly and on educators to prepare individuals to make good use of such resources:

Next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory, is want of mental cultivation. A cultivated mind—I do not mean that of a philosopher, but any mind to which the fountains of knowledge have been opened, and which has been taught, in any tolerable degree, to exercise its faculties—finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it; in the objects of nature, the achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry, the incidents of history, the ways of mankind past and present, and their prospects in the future. (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 2.13)

We can only wonder what Mill would have thought about the internet and its potential to provide the world population with an inexhaustible source of interest. And we can only cringe to reflect on how most people actually use this staggering resource!

Third, Mill is not merely saying that contributing to the general happiness is a good idea; he is saying that it is the *only* thing that makes an act right or wrong.

In this, Mill differs from the ancients on a number of points. First of all, he is asking a different question. The quest of Aristotle and friends to become good and virtuous people has been placed on the back burner. Mill's focus is on actions and what makes them right or wrong. While Aristotle admitted that pleasure had a place in the good life, he treated it at best as a secondary effect of the human final end: a life of virtuous, rational activity. Mill turns the tables, arguing that pleasure is the goal, and human activity, even our rational activity, is merely a means to that end.

In this, Mill sets out a clearly consequentialist position, arguing that the rightness or wrongness of an act depends *only* on its consequences. This contrasts sharply with Kant's nonconsequentialism (see Lesson 6). It also contrasts with the ancient hedonism of Epicurus. Both Mill and Epicurus hold pleasure to be humanity's final end, to which both subject all other concerns. Epicurus goes so far as to say, "Injustice is not a bad thing in its own right, but [only] because of the fear produced by the suspicion that one will not escape the notice of those assigned to punish such actions" (Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 34).

The two figures differ, however, in their account of pleasure. Mill calls on us to maximize pleasure in both quantity and quality. In this he perhaps shows his Victorian zeal for social reform. Epicurus, by contrast, argues that "the removal of the feeling of pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasure" (Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 3). This may strike us as implausible: Surely simply not being in pain is less pleasurable than not being in pain while eating chocolate! Epicurus's response: "As soon as the feeling of pain produced by want is removed, pleasure . . . is not increased but only varied" (Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 18). This may seem a somewhat quirky position, but its practical implications are huge.

Both Plato and Aristotle established philosophical schools in gyms, blending training for the body and training for the mind, as a way of preparing young men to take their place in the political life of the city. The first Stoics set up shop in the painted porch (*stoa poikile*) in the heart of the Athens marketplace (*agora*). Their Roman successors, most famously Nero's tutor, Seneca, and Emperor Marcus Aurelius took a similarly active role in political life. Epicurus, however, settled his school in a garden outside the walls of Athens at a safe distance from the heart of the city's political life. Politics, after all, can be quite stressful.

If the highest good is pleasure and the highest pleasure is the absence of pain, the best course of action, Epicurus argues, is to minimize our desires. Put simply, if we set our expectations low enough, we will rarely be disappointed. In some ways, Epicureans are the first hippies, and their goal of "unperturbedness" (*ataraxia*) might just as easily be translated as "chilling."

Whatever we think of Epicureans' choice to opt out of politics, their general strategy of filling desires by minimizing expectations finds parallels in both Buddhism and contemporary positive psychology. The latter is now producing evidence that, after a certain point, something like \$75,000 a year, increases in one's income no longer increase one's overall happiness, understood as overall satisfaction with life (Kahneman and Deaton 2010).

On reflection, this makes sense. Poverty can be both stressful and painful. Yet, once one's basic needs are met, fancier things tend simply to breed fancier desires. While no one likes to go hungry, people who routinely go out

for expensive dinners will tend, over time, to want even more expensive dinners. We have already seen Aristotle's ideas of moderation butt heads with the American dream of seeking a better (material) life. Epicurus extends the position by providing a strategy for lowering Aristotle's mean by simply minimizing expectations.

In sum, while it sounds great to say that doing the right thing is whatever contributes to the greater good, spelling out what that means is more complicated than it may seem. Yet, these complexities have given us a rich conceptual vocabulary: higher versus lower pleasures, one's own good versus the overall good, questions about our ethical obligation to reduce animal suffering, different ideas about the relationship between pleasure and the absence of pain, and strategies for maximizing pleasure by minimizing desire. Many of these ideas have been fashioned in opposition to others; nevertheless, some of them may be combined in creative ways.

Peter Singer (1999), for instance, argues that individuals are right to spend up to \$30,000 a year on themselves *for necessities* but should donate the rest of their income to help reduce world suffering. The argument has proven controversial, yet it dovetails nicely with Epicurean strategies for reducing desires and positive psychology's evidence that, after a certain point, more money does not buy more happiness. In some respects, the modern Utilitarianism of Mill and Singer works best on a large scale with questions of how to distribute finite resources, while the ancient hedonism of Epicurus works best for thinking about one's individual life.

Many of these considerations, whether of cathedrals or health care policies, will be on a scale that is simply too large for children who are still getting a feel for counting. Still, the basic concepts are within their reach, and the lesson arcs that follow invite children to engage with these concepts; play them off one another; and, in the process, join each other in discussion. In Lesson 6, we set all such consequentialist ideas within a larger discussion by pitting them against the nonconsequentialist ideas of Kant.²

Discussion Questions for Teachers

1. Do you, your school, or your community engage in "guilty pleasures" (i.e., things that enrich your life but aren't strictly necessary)? Do you feel guilty about them? Why? Is it wrong that resources are spent on these things when there are more pressing needs in your immediate community, your country, and abroad? Why or why not?
2. When do you fail to appreciate the "sources of inexhaustible interest" that surround you? How could thinking about Mill or Epicurus help you better take pleasure in life? How well are you preparing your students to appreciate the world around them?

3. How do you get children to share when they don't want to? Do you merely use your authority as a teacher, or do you give them reasons? If the latter, what are these reasons, and how might they line up with the thinking of Mill or Singer?

THE GREATER GOOD IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

How do children develop an understanding of what is good for others? Even one-year-olds show sympathy, the ability to see another person's emotions and experience them. Crying and laughing are contagious! But empathy is the ability to both share and understand another's feelings, even if they are different from your own—to see things from the other person's view. Sympathy sees another child crying and cries, too. Empathy searches for a way to stop the pain.

Through a discussion of good for me versus the good for all, this lesson helps children practice the language of empathy. But this raises a psychological question: What does one child know of another child's view?

Early theorists, including Freud and Piaget, doubted that children showed empathy, but a wealth of studies have shown otherwise. For example, newborns display distress when other babies cry. When children eighteen to twenty-four months old are exposed to the simulated distress of a stranger, they react with concern, "what happened?" questions, hypothesis testing, hugs, and offering assistance. Many of these behaviors increase and get more target appropriate from ages two to three, when children will also offer advice. Cognitive empathy, also called theory of mind or perspective taking, is the ability to imagine another's experience, and this grows rapidly between the ages of three and five. McDonald and Messinger (2011) have reviewed this developmental progression.

False Belief Tasks. By age five, children can accurately take another's view. Imagine a situation in which Diane is shown an Oreo cookies box and asked what is inside. She predicts: Oreos. Then, the box is opened, and she sees that it is filled with red blocks! The adult tells Diane that soon Erik will enter the room and be asked what is in the box. What does Diane predict?

If she says that Erik will think there are red blocks in the box, we reason that Diane cannot see Erik's view. He does not, in fact, have her special knowledge. But if Diane correctly says that Erik will guess Oreos, we know that Diane has a *theory of mind*: She knows her mind and Erik's are not the same. Similar scenarios involve hidden objects. The ability to solve the false-belief task develops in lockstep with other forms of empathy, such as helping

others in distress, and it's essential for understanding that what is good for *me* may not be good for *everyone*.

Giving to Imaginary Others. Even three- to five-year-old children show biases in their prosocial care for others based on race and gender. Renno and Shutts (2015) found that children are most generous toward their family and friends, which makes sense. But in specially constructed games, where children were asked to give away coins to pictures of unfamiliar children, white children gave away fewer resources to children who were a different race or gender from their own.

They were then shown the photos and asked, “Who do you think would help if you fell down?” and other, similar questions about empathetic helping. Children expected help more often from children of their own gender, and white children expected help mainly from white photos. Even at age three to five, giving to others is predicted by race and gender, indicating that the P4C program is far from too early.

TEACHER REFLECTION

What's more important—food or colors? Shelter or the feel of sunshine? These are some ideas that the book *Frederick* by Leo Lionni brings to the surface for children. While playing the river game, children were asked, “If you could only take one thing on a long trip, what would it be?” In one instance, a child answered “candy”; in another, a girl answered “my stuffy,” meaning her stuffed animal. The debate ranged widely among children as they discussed why each was the best thing to take with them.

This discussion, while perhaps somewhat trivial in its content, shows the deep thinking that will occur when children are given the right structure and the chance for open dialogue with sensitive adults. Deep thinking about personal experiences makes the river game so powerful for children. And yet, we are not exploring serious issues or unsettling ideas that would make some children nervous or afraid to play. By the end of the game, our children changed their minds and agreed the stuffed animal was more important because you could sleep with it and use it as a pillow, but when the candy was gone, it was all gone.

Did the children actually become Utilitarians? Did the discussions lead them to conclude that some things are more important than others? We will not know how the children access these experiences in the future, but the discussions and their conclusions helped teachers focus more on the interactions between children during the day and not disregard the importance of children's friendship situations, however mundane or inconsequential they may seem to us in the broader scheme of the school.

It matters when children don't share, and it matters how teachers interact with children to help them resolve conflicts when they arise. It makes a difference in children's learning if we dictate the answers without working through the details with them. As teachers, we sometimes try to keep the peace by providing the solution to the situation; yet, we found the exact opposite approach was more effective at helping the children decide the best course of action.

Just as Mill can challenge adults to consider their own actions to determine whether they are for the greater good or selfishly for their own, so, too, we found that children, given the opportunities to discuss and consider perspectives, are very capable and even likely to become deep thinkers with consideration for others.

LESSON 5A. THE GREATER GOOD

Storybook: Leo Lionni, *It's Mine!*

Materials: Chairs and music for Musical Chairs, something to play music, one piece of paper per child, fewer rainbow-colored crayons than children present

Goal: Children will use the terms "good for me" versus "good for everybody" in discussion, giving at least one example.

In this lesson, children will puzzle through the greatest good. Utilitarianism calls on individuals to view their own happiness as part of the general happiness. This is a countercultural idea, particularly in a free-market, competitive context. Children should start thinking about whether particular actions or choices are "good for me" versus "good for everyone." There will be a temptation here to fall into a clear moral: everyone share. Resist this.

Instead, ask children to think about what's more fun (the four-year-old's version of Mill's greatest happiness): doing what's good just for me or doing what's good for everyone? There is a legitimate puzzle here. Help them think through it.

Game: Musical Chairs (with a Twist)

Explain to children that they will be playing Musical Chairs. While the music is playing, everyone walks around the chairs in a circle; when the music stops, everyone must sit in a chair. Each round, take away one chair. The twist this time is that you will encourage children to share chairs with those who are without. The longer this progresses, the sillier—and hopefully more fun—it will become. As opportunities present themselves, ask questions such as these:

- (To a child without a chair) How does it feel to have nowhere to sit?
- (To a child with a chair) How does it feel to have a chair when your friend doesn't?
- (To children sharing a chair) How does it feel to share?

Story

This story presents three self-centered frogs who are driven together by a storm and eventually come to value sharing. A recurring refrain drives home the contrast between “It’s mine” and “It’s ours.” Ham this up. As you read, ask questions such as these:

- “Quarrelsome frogs” → What does “quarrelsome” mean? Why do you think they’re quarreling?
- “The water/earth is mine” → Do you think anyone owns the water/earth?
- “The air is mine” → Do you think these frogs are happy?
- Worm → Do you think these frogs are friends?
- Stones disappearing → How do you think the frogs feel?
- Flood subsided → Why do the frogs feel better now?
- Jumped in side by side → Why are the frogs sharing the water now?
- Leaped after butterflies → Do you think the one frog, Lydia, was happier when she had all the butterflies for herself or now when she’s sharing them?
- “It’s ours” → What do you like more: sharing your toys or having them all to yourself?

Art Project: Drawing a Rainbow and Frogs

Ask children if they have ever seen a rainbow after it rains. Give them each a piece of paper and ask them to draw what the frogs will do now that a rainbow is out and the storm is over. Be careful, though, to give them fewer crayons than they need. This will create situations in which they need to think about how to trade and share crayons (while frogs might come out purple, a rainbow takes multiple colors). As situations come up, ask questions such as these:

- How do friends feel when they don’t have anything to draw with?
- Is it more fun to share a crayon or to have it all to yourself?
- What are your frogs doing? How do they feel?

LESSON 5B. HIGHER VERSUS LOWER PLEASURES

Storybook: Leo Lionni, *Frederick*

Materials: “River,” graham crackers, frosting, candy

Goal: Children will be able to share their ideas about why the mice changed their opinions of Frederick over the course of the story.

In this lesson, children will reflect on the difference between lower pleasures (physical, immediate, and sometimes selfish) and higher pleasures (involving thought, longer term, and often social). At the very least, the children should see the difference between these kinds of pleasures. Ideally, they will see them as sometimes conflicting (e.g., eating the candy versus making something with it) and discuss their relative worth.

River Game: If You Could Bring One Thing with You on a Long Trip, What Would It Be?

Once one child has made a claim, have him or her stand on one side of the river; all who agree stand on that side, and all who disagree stand on the other. Then ask questions such as these:

- (To agreeing child) Is that something you need? What would happen if you didn't have it?
- (To disagreeing child) What would you rather take? Why is that more important?

Story

This classic story drives home the difference between higher and lower pleasures via mice who prepare both food and poetry for the winter. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “Gather sun rays” → Do you think Frederick is really working?
- “Winter is gray” → Do you think the mice *need* colors?
- “Happy family” → Do you think they have everything they need?
- “No one felt like chatting” → How do you think the mice feel?
- “Your supplies, Frederick” → What supplies did Frederick bring?
- “Was it magic?” → What is Frederick doing?
- “Colors” → How do the mice feel now?
- End of poem → Do you like Frederick's poem? How does it make you feel?
- End → Who brought the more important supplies? Frederick or the other mice?

Art Project: Gingerbread House

Tell the children that they will be building a house together. You can connect this to the rest of the lesson by saying it is a place for the mice to live or a place they will stay in on their trip. The point is to create teachable moments where the desire for a higher pleasure (creating a long-term structure for the common good) runs up against a lower one (eating the building supplies). If children ask about eating the candy, ask questions such as these:

- If you eat the candy, how can you build a house?
- What is more important: having candy right now or having a house for a long time?
- Is eating the candy good for everyone or just you?

LESSON 5C. COMPETING PLEASURES

Storybook: Mark Pett, *The Girl and the Bicycle*

Materials: Playground set with one high-profile toy surrounded by a bunch of other toys that need to be put away (see closing activity)

Goal: Children will participate in the discussion about competing pleasures by offering at least one relevant answer or example.

In this lesson, children are invited to reflect on competing pleasures: short term versus long term, higher versus lower, selfish versus altruistic. In particular, we can play off the ancient idea that it's best to be content with little (the boy in the story) and the more modern idea that it's better to maximize pleasures through hard work (the girl in the story). All such pleasures are good, so we should encourage children to explore different intuitions.

Narrating the Story

To start, ask children to recall what they've been doing in the last two lessons. They might respond better to the stories (the frogs and the mice) or to the activities (Musical Chairs versus building a gingerbread house). Tell them they'll be doing something different today and that they will be "reading" their teachers a story by describing what is going on in pictures. As you move through this wordless book, draw their attention to Utilitarian issues by asking questions such as these:

- Running from shop window → What do you think the girl is planning to do?
- Couch → Why is the girl looking in her couch? What is the boy doing? Who is having more fun?
- “Everything must go” → Would you sell all your toys to buy a bicycle? What’s better: having lots of toys or one really cool toy?
- Looking for work → Who are these people? What is the girl trying to do?
- Raking leaves/cleaning → Is she having fun doing work? Why is she doing it? (Make sure the children get that a lot of time is going by.)
- Clipping hedge → Are the girl and the woman friends?
- Table of money → Is the girl happy now? Is the boy happy? Who is having more fun?
- Going into the shop → Is the girl’s money useful now that the bicycle is gone?
- Boy on tricycle → Is the boy happy now? What about the girl?
- Bicycle with ribbon → Why did the woman buy the girl the bicycle? She already paid her.
- Girl and boy leave → Is the woman happy now?

Since much of this story takes place outside, you will transition directly into an outdoor activity.

Activity: Working on the Playground

Set up a high-profile toy on the playground (e.g., a new basketball net), but have it surrounded by a bunch of other outdoor toys that need to be put away before children can use it. Tell the children if they want to play with this toy, they need to put away the other toys first. Look for opportunities to spark mini discussions.

- (If a child gets tired of cleaning) Do you think playing with the new toy is worth all this work?
- (If some children aren’t helping as much) Do you think it’s fair that <child> isn’t helping?
- Would it be more fun to play with something else?

NOTES

1. References to Mill are given in the form of chapter.paragraph.

2. Those wishing to go further in their reading may start by simply googling “Peter Singer.” Mill’s essay *Utilitarianism* remains a classic and is available for free online. [Chapter 2](#) is particularly useful, as Mill sets out what Utilitarianism is by responding (in a very snarky fashion) to people who get it wrong.

Epicurean thought is available in many translations, such as Inwood and Gerson (1994). In addition to defending hedonism, Epicureans were among the first to defend the view that the world is composed of atoms and void. Many of their writings go beyond concerns dealt with here, but Epicurus’s *Principal Doctrines* and *Letter to Menoeceus* are a good place to start.

Chapter 9

Lesson 6: Rules and Respect

KANT ON NONCONSEQUENTIALISM

We now turn to the intersection of action and intention. Mill has laid out a consequentialist position: The right thing to do is the one that maximizes happiness overall. While that seems like a good goal in general, aren't there times when it's the thought that counts?

We've all had sweaters that we hated but had to wear because our grandmothers gave them to us. Perhaps we ourselves have goofed at times, giving a box of chocolates to someone we didn't know was diabetic or saying the wrong thing and inadvertently ruining someone's day. In none of these cases was there any ill will, just a botched execution that brought about suffering rather than pleasure. Are we willing to go along with Mill and claim that we—and our grandmothers—have performed actions that were morally wrong? If we take an action's consequences to be the *only* factor deciding its worth, we seem to have no other choice.

When it comes to a question of botched gift giving, we can likely defend Mill on his own terms. While we might not like the sweater, few of us would come to *hate* our grandmothers as a result. At least in the long run. In time, we can come to feel a higher pleasure as we appreciate the care shown by our grandmothers' attempt to make us happy. If a young child hands his teddy bear over when Dad has lost his job, this might, in fact, cheer Dad up. In either case, a lower pain is involved, but it is overshadowed by higher and greater pleasures.

But what if we flip the example to a case of ill intent with good consequences? Say two girls in middle school, Anabel and Nia, get into a fight. Anabel intends to humiliate Nia by revealing some embarrassing secret to the rest of the school, but the plan backfires, as Nia deals nimbly with the

situation, likens herself to a popular movie star, and thus gains popularity in the eyes of her peers. Should we commend Anabel for performing a morally correct action? What if the plan had worked and brought humiliation? It seems odd for the morality of Anabel's actions to rely on factors outside her control. Doesn't that leave a bit too much to luck?

According to Kant, it is always possible to do the right thing. Luck has nothing to do with morality. According to his theory, it is the actor's intent that makes an act right or wrong. For Kant, all moral worth flows from a good will. To see how he elaborates on this thought, let us look at real-world examples when the good of the few is sacrificed for the good of the many.

Periodically in U.S. cities, minority neighborhoods are hacked apart to build interstates or airports that serve a larger community. If this strikes us as wrong, can we defend it along Utilitarian lines? We might say that the suffering caused by destroying a community simply outweighs the pleasure made possible by new infrastructures, even if those infrastructures are used by far more people than were displaced. Yet, with this, we fall into quibbling over a very odd kind of math as we try to determine whether such acts really are for the greater good. What unit of measure should we apply to pleasure and suffering, and how can we apply it objectively?¹

Yet, surely there are cases where the greater good clearly *is* served. Consider the creation of Shenandoah National Park in the 1930s. The government either bought or condemned the homes of at least five hundred families described as "almost completely cut off from the current of American life . . . in what was considered by some to be an humanitarian act" (Horning 2015). The result was a park that preserves an important piece of American wilderness and provides pleasure to millions and jobs for the community. The displaced families were compensated, at least in some cases, and moved into what many considered a higher standard of living.

We could quibble with the particulars, but what if we grant for the sake of argument that these people's standard of living did go up and that the park really did contribute to the greater good? The problem still remains that these five hundred families didn't have a choice in the matter, really. Was the U.S. government right to displace these people? Mill would have to say yes: It is perhaps unfortunate, but sometimes difficult decisions need to be made for the greater good.²

The trouble with Utilitarianism is that it does not respect individuals' autonomy—their freedom to set their own goals. Mill might reply that he takes into account how families *feel* about being displaced, throwing their pleasure and suffering into the equation. For Kant, this isn't good enough. His ethical theory is based on respect for the human individual. The trick is to spell out what "respect" amounts to.

Kant was a key figure of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. For him, ideas of respect, and morality in general, are tied up in humanity's capacity for reason. These were the days when deists argued that God was basically a grand watchmaker; that the world was basically a complex machine; and that—given enough time—people could, through a combination of reason and observation, unlock all the secrets of life.

A lot has happened since the eighteenth century. The horrors of two world wars have challenged the assumption that the world is a totally rational place. Unchecked developments in science and technology have had economic and environmental repercussions that we are only starting to grasp. Our communication technologies, meanwhile, have shown us just how much diversity there is in the world. What were once seen as eternal truths of “rationality” have been critiqued as really just cultural biases. As a result, the Enlightenment's faith in reason has been thrown into question. (Lesson 7 explores a feminist perspective on these issues.)

Still, there is *something* to the idea that, when it comes to morality, issues of respect and intent matter. This is all the more pressing in light of new nationalisms arising around the globe that displace ideals of universal human rights with in-group/out-group thinking. Kant presents a milestone in the history of philosophy about how to spell out these ideas. At the heart of his moral theory is what he calls “the categorical imperative”—the moral law that must be followed in all cases without exception. Kant says that this can be formulated in three ways. We focus on the first two.³

The first formulation builds on the relationship between reason and autonomy. The literal meaning of “autonomy” is “to give laws to oneself.” For Kant, however, to be autonomous does not mean doing whatever you happen to feel like. Rather, it is to set for yourself the laws that a perfectly rational person would. This should make us suspicious. Who is this perfectly rational person? What about times when cultures disagree about the best thing to do? Who gets to decide what is *really* best? Kant's answer to the last of these is: you do.

Rather than get bogged down in working out lists of what thou shalt and shalt not do, Kant gives us instructions for figuring it out ourselves. As Kant puts it, “Act only according to that maxim [i.e., rule] through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (Kant, *Groundwork* 4:421). Or, to put it in the terms of young children, if you want to do something, stop and think, “What if everyone did that?” If the resulting world isn't riddled with contradiction, the action is okay. Let's take one of Kant's examples: the lying promise.

Tommy wants Jack's truck. So he promises that if Jack gives him the truck, he will give Jack his shovel. Tommy, however, has no intention of giving up his shovel and just wants all the toys for himself. Now let's imagine a

world where there's a rule: If you want something, get it by making promises you don't intend to keep. Could such a world function? Kant thinks not. If everyone was obligated to make lying promises whenever they wanted something, no one would believe anyone. The whole practice of promising would collapse! The only reason that lying promises work in the real world is that we expect people to follow through with promises.

The "what if everybody did that?" test drives home the fact that, when we lie, we make a sort of exception for ourselves. Other rules fare better: If you want to use someone's toy, ask permission; if someone is speaking, listen; if you want to speak, raise your hand. If these were made rules that everyone must follow, no contradiction would arise. According to Kant, an action that fails the "what if everybody did that?" test is wrong. Actions with moral worth, by contrast, are those that we perform because they pass this test. Kantians sometimes refer to this first formulation of the categorical imperative as the "formulation from universality."

In thinking through this first formulation of the categorical imperative, each of us imagined a world and thought in universal terms. That's pretty cool. Dogs may be smart, but from what we can tell, they just aren't wired to keep up with the present conversation. And it's not just a language barrier. This ability to engage with universal concepts and imagine whole worlds is, in Kant's estimation, what lets us into what we might call "the rationality club." If it turns out that certain nonhuman animals (chimps or dolphins, perhaps) are capable of thinking in universal terms, we'll let them in, too.

Why does this matter? For Kant, the ability to think in universal terms and autonomously set laws for oneself is what separates *people* from *things*, and we have obligations toward people that we do not have toward things.

The second formulation of the categorical imperative relies on the respect due to autonomous, rational people. According to Kant, people have worth in themselves, and things have worth only insofar as some person confers worth on them. The only reason a diamond is worth more than a doorstop is that people are willing to pay more for diamonds than for doorstops. Sure, diamonds are rarer, but lots of things are rare that we would not pay large sums for. Since people confer worth on other things, Kant argues, people must have worth in themselves.

The upshot of all this is that it is wrong for us to put a price tag on people. Slavery is perhaps the clearest example. Since a slave owner and a slave are both human beings, for the one to place a monetary value on the other ignores the inherent value that they both share. People aren't things, and if we treat them as commodities, we fundamentally misunderstand how value actually works. In less extreme situations, if I want to use a doorstop or sell a diamond, I don't need to worry about the object's best interests. I can simply use it as a means to my own ends.

Still, we all use other people all the time. Students use teachers when they ask questions. Teachers use students to draw a paycheck. Customers use cashiers to buy things. Citizens use government officials to run things. Government officials use citizens to get elected. Are we all wrong in this? Kant's point is that when we use each other—which we need to do for society to function—we cannot use each other as *mere* means; we must, rather, *also* treat people as ends in themselves. So far so good, but what does that mean in practice?

It's at this point that a page from medieval philosophy might help us make sense of Kant. According to Augustine, the first step toward happiness is a rightly oriented will. This entails valuing objects for what they are actually worth, and Augustine sorts all possible objects of our will into three broad classes: things, people, and God/truth.⁴ While we can quibble about the relative worth of diamonds and cell phones, something has gone horribly wrong if I run in front of a bus to save a cell phone but let a person get hit.

While that particular example might seem far-fetched, many conveniences of the developed world, from the clothes we wear to the food we eat, are made possible through the exploitation of people in developing countries. This is wrong, according to Augustine, since it shows that we value convenience more than we value people. On a more local level, if I steal your phone, I value a thing, the phone, more than I value you, a person. Likewise, if I trick you into doing me a favor, I value that favor more than I value you.

For Kant, treating someone as an end in most cases means doing only those things that that person would freely agree to—stress on “freely.” If I lie to you, I compromise your ability to make informed decisions. In this sense, I am compromising your freedom, and I am thus not respecting you as a rational agent capable of deciding things for yourself. Kantians sometimes refer to this second formulation of the categorical imperative as the “formulation from autonomy” or the “formulation from humanity.” For our purposes, we might think of either as embodying respect.

Kant's ethic of respect holds up an egalitarian ideal, placing all rational agents—up to and including God—on the same footing as autonomous agents deserving respect.⁵ Still, we might wonder about those beings that don't get into the rationality club. If the world is divided into rational people and nonrational things, should we treat animals as things? Is the only reason a dog is worth more than a stick because a human being decided it was so?

What's more, chimps or dolphins may have a shot at making it into the club, but what about those animals that don't? What about those that only come close? Do squid and pigs not deserve our respect? People who think they do are usually drawn to Mill's Utilitarian ideas instead. Whether a pig can reason or not, it's pretty clear it can feel pleasure or pain, even psychological pleasure or pain. Animals can play. They feel stress. According to

Mill, these feelings matter, and humans are obligated to factor them in to our Utilitarian calculations.⁶

As for human beings, questions of respect get tricky when dealing with people who are, in some senses, not equal. Many adults never achieve hypothetico-deductive reasoning, and thus they make decisions based on emotions and not facts. While this sounds harsh to say, it is reflected in our actions, as there are certain people to whom we deny legal autonomy for their own good.

We may all agree that we should care for such people, but the question remains: Why? Mill has a ready answer: People who are deficient in reason can still feel, and we should respect that. It is not clear that Kant has a ready response. Insofar as it isn't possible to *sort of* use universal concepts, Kant's entry requirements for the rationality club are unforgiving. You are in, or you are out.

What are the implications of Kant's ideas for children? According to Piaget, from ages one to five, children occupy a cognitively egocentric view of the world and are incapable of using abstract concepts or of thinking from any perspective but their own. This is a different scenario than we find in mature dolphins, who might be reasoning, albeit in a language we don't understand. If we were to find a common language that would allow children to communicate abstract, universal ideas, we would simply be *bringing* them out of the concrete egocentric stage through linguistic scaffolding.

Developmental psychologists may disagree about where to draw the line separating children who can use universal concepts from those who cannot, but all agree that there is a line to be drawn. The current question is: What should we do with children who fall on the far side of that line? Do they not deserve our respect? Should we treat them not as people but as things that we happen to value?

Here a Kantian, at last, has a response. While there is little chance of helping nonrational animals acquire the capacity to deal in universal concepts, nearly all human beings grow out of egocentrism. A Kantian may thus respect children by respecting the people they will eventually become.

What does respecting a child actually entail? At the very least, it seems obvious that we should treat them as people, not things, when it comes to questions of value. If a child chases a ball into traffic, you should save the child, not the ball. Yet, for Kant, autonomy is at the core of what it is to be a person. If we are going to treat children as people, should we allow them to set the rules for themselves?

On an average day, a parent will tell a child when to wake up, choose his clothes for him, force him to brush his teeth, decide what he will spend his day doing, and send him to bed against his will. Imagine if this same parent

did this for a partner! This would not be a healthy relationship, but it could be perfectly acceptable parenting. Up to a point, at least.

A possible compromise here is to treat children as partly autonomous or, even better, as *becoming* autonomous. According to most kindergarten teachers, children's independence in self-care and social problem solving are the most important school-readiness skills. Ideally, we should allow young children to make decisions for themselves, provided those decisions will help them become more autonomous in the future. While a child may prefer ice cream to vegetables and video games to homework, honoring such preferences would lead to long-term health problems and intellectual setbacks of a sort that could hinder autonomy later in life.

We adults should also be wary of falling into considering only our own views. It might be obvious to us why a child staying up all night to watch TV and eat ice cream is a bad idea. But think about it from the child's perspective for a minute: If TV and ice cream are okay sometimes, why aren't they okay all the time? If grown-ups get to do whatever they want, why can't I? And why is it that other people get to tell me what to do all the time?

While it may be socially acceptable for a parent simply to dictate a child's day, the best parenting involves explaining to children the rationale behind these dictates. This will help the child become autonomous most quickly of all, as it will help him or her build habits of thinking actions through. It may come with some attempts to negotiate for later bedtimes and just one more scoop of ice cream, but that is part of the process.

What about respecting children's ideas? By this point in our P4C curriculum, it should be clear to everyone that young children are capable of greater insight and more sophisticated lines of inquiry than many tend to think. Whether young children can navigate universal concepts in ways that would satisfy Kant or not, they certainly have their own interests.

What's more, children's beliefs about the world, while limited relative to most adults', are growing and adapting at a rate that would make most adults' heads spin. To respect children as thinkers, we adults must overcome our own shortsightedness and realize what an intellectual adventure day-to-day living is for someone at age four. And we should do all we can to take children's ideas seriously and help them as they develop into ever more mature thinkers.⁷

Discussion Questions for Teachers

1. Can you think of any rules today—your school's, the state's, religious conventions, and so on—that fail the “what if everybody did that?” test? Should we get rid of them?

2. Have you ever overridden a child's autonomy for his or her own good? Did you explain your reasons to the child? What should you do if the child does not accept your reasons?
3. Most people reading this book will agree that we need to respect the rights of others. But what gives a person rights in the first place? Kant thought it was rationality. If you think that is problematic, how do *you* separate people from things? Is it just a matter of legal convention? What about laws that were mistaken (e.g., laws allowing slavery or denying women the right to vote)?

HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHILDREN'S LIVES

The issue of children's rights, and their status before they become nonegocentric, rational beings, is hotly debated around the world. Some consensus has emerged in the legal understanding of respect for children's lives and ideas. To draw on Lesson 7, "a person's a person, no matter how small." But what if everybody treated children as things, not people, and as nonrational beings? Such a situation exists in our world, where female children can be bought; sold; promised as child brides; and denied access to education, health care, and an economic identity. What if everybody did that?

Children, who do not vote, need the protection of adults in order to secure their rights while they are on the road to becoming rational, autonomous individuals. Several major organizations have codified these rights: the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Society for Research in Child Development, the American Psychological Association, and UNICEF. Reflecting their beliefs about the rational nature of children, each organization has a different priority.

Recognizing children's need for protection, as of August 16, 2018, the NAEYC website states in its core values that early educators must do the following:

- Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague).
- Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues.
- Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect.

The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines children as "every human being under eighteen years of age" and outlines children's political, civil, social, cultural, and economic rights (United

Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 1990). The CRC is a legally binding international treaty, ratified by every country in the world, with the exception of the United States. It includes protection from neglect, dangerous work, exploitation, and conscription.

Before the CRC, many governments argued that child labor and slavery were essential for the economy, that child brides kept the social institution of marriage stable, that female genital surgery served the greater good of chastity, and that infants born with disabilities were so expensive to feed that families were better off if the infants were left to die. Such Utilitarian arguments still echo around the world, but they are no longer legal in UN member states.

The UN CRC also guarantees children self-determination: the right to participate in decision making about their own lives and futures at every age. This has been controversial. Member states, such as the Netherlands, have addressed issues like the minimum age for charging a child with a felony (raised from twelve to fourteen) and the prohibition of female genital surgery. Children at twelve must also have a voice in their own medical care, custody cases, and hearings about foster-care placements and adoption. School-age children must be included in decision making about educational planning.

In discussion of the CRC and early childhood, we know that we have to plan for children according to their capacity, worth, and potential, not just meet their immediate needs. Programs like P4C need to be available to those of all socioeconomic status groups, not just the children of the elite; the potential for rational thought and improved critical-thinking skills exists in all.

Articles 12 and 13 of the CRC make it clear that the writers thought of children as rational beings needing our protection but not our dictatorship:

- “The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.”
- “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

Imagine a world in which everybody does this! This very act of imagining a future world is, in itself, a critical-thinking skill for children.

TEACHER REFLECTION

The stories used for this lesson bring to life some trusted ideals of our pre-school philosophy program. We seek to foster good communication skills, we learn to respect others' space, and we understand the rules that keep everyone safe. As guiding principles, these are easy to articulate but not so easy to teach young children. The developmental progress of individual children will affect their ability to live up to these guiding principles, but the circumstances under which they can practice the skills is vitally important to their acquisition.

The activities in Lesson 6 offer us the opportunity to practice ideas of respect and to do so in a moment that is not critically or emotionally important to the child (e.g., when they are not involved in an altercation, an argument, or a scuffle over a toy). We practice in the *non*-heat of the moment. In this way, we realized yet another value to the practice of philosophy: It is a vehicle to practice discussion, and analyze ideas, when all of this has little direct, personal impact on us.

We also practiced a bit of "sabotage" with the children, as we forced them to be in situations that foster cooperation, collaboration, and social learning. To this end, we purposefully limited materials or structured the environment to foster interaction or to meet a child's specific challenges. For instance, when we play "my turn, your turn" games, we purposefully limit how many balls we are playing with so that children can practice using the words "my turn" and "your turn." The curriculum was designed to accomplish carefully orchestrated roadblocks of this sort, which may be confronted without compromising the integrity of the lesson.

Our teachers challenged Lesson 6c, which asks children to think of a time when someone failed to respect them. Would this confuse the children? Would it conflict with their understanding of how to respect their parents? Would it open a Pandora's box that parents would then be hard-pressed to close? We found, however, that children seemed to understand the idea of respect. As one child put it, "My brother always sneaks away from my mom because he wants to play outside and he has to do his homework." The child's understanding is that his brother is not respecting his mother because he is acting in a way that defies her wishes.

LESSON 6A. OUTCOME VERSUS INTENT

Storybook: Sheryl Webster, *What Small Rabbit Heard*

Materials: Paper, drawing supplies

Goal: Children will demonstrate an understanding of intent versus result, or “meant to,” by providing at least one relevant example during discussion.

In this lesson, children will reflect on the difference between what one intends and what actually happens. This drives a conceptual wedge between consequentialism and nonconsequentialism. They will consider, and ideally discuss, whether it is the intent or the outcome of an action that makes it right or wrong.

Game: Telephone

Each player whispers a given message into a neighbor’s ear. When the cycle is complete, the last person reports to the group what he or she heard. In our version, we will then ask the person who first came up with the phrase what he or she “intended” or “meant to say.” As the opportunity arises, ask questions such as these:

- If you intended/meant to say X, how did the message get changed?
- Can you remember a time someone didn’t understand what you were saying?
- Did you ever intend to do something and something else actually happened?

Among other things, this is a great game for practicing the “listening” rule.

Story

This story turns on a series of miscommunications, causing Small Rabbit to think Big Rabbit is telling him to do all kinds of annoying things. Given the things that Small Rabbit actually does, it is easy to think that he is being naughty (consequentialism); yet, given that he thinks he is doing what Big Rabbit asks, it is hard to blame him (nonconsequentialism). The book is formulaic in an endearing sort of way. Ham it up. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “Now off we go.” → Is Small Rabbit behaving himself? Is he being good or just annoying?
- “Jump in the mud.” → What did Big Rabbit intend for Small Rabbit to do? What actually happened?
- “Roll in the leaves.” → Do you think Big Rabbit wants Small Rabbit to roll in the leaves?
- “I want you to wait.” → What do you think Small Rabbit is going to hear?

- “Open the gate.” → Is Small Rabbit being naughty? (See if you can spark disagreement.)
- “Ride on the goat.” → How does Big Rabbit Feel? Is Small Rabbit being naughty now?
- “Don’t go inside.” → What do you think will happen?
- End → Has Small Rabbit done bad things? (Encourage discussion.)

Art Project: Draw a Time You Intended to Do One Thing and Something Else Happened

Have each child draw what they intended to do and what actually happened. So far, they’ve explored a lot of miscommunication, so they will likely default to that. To push them further, it might help for a leader to give an example of an intended action that didn’t go as planned (e.g., “One time, I meant to make my friend laugh, so I snuck up and said, ‘boo,’ but he started crying instead.”). As children work, engage them in conversation with questions such as these:

- What did you intend? What actually happened?
- How did you feel when things didn’t go as you intended?
- Do you think you were being good? Did other people think you were being good? Why?

LESSON 6B. RULES

Storybook: Mac Barnett, *Rules of the House*⁸

Materials: None

Goal: Children will practice using the first formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative, framed as “What would happen if there was a rule that . . . ?” by giving at least one relevant answer.

Game: What If Everybody Did That? Part I

Today you’re playing What If Everybody Did That? The leader will give scenarios, such as the following, and have children act them out:

- If you want to talk, raise your hand and wait until you’re called on.
- If you want to talk, just talk.
- If you want to play with your friend’s toy, ask nicely for it.
- If you want to play with your friend’s toy, just take it.

- If your friend starts talking, jump up and down and yell.
- If your friend starts talking, listen until she finishes talking.

While you play, ask questions such as these:

- (Before acting out) What do you think will happen?
- (While acting out) Is this a good idea?
- (After acting out) Should we make this a rule that everyone should follow? Why or why not?

Story

This story plays with the idea of rules. The brother follows rules; the sister breaks them. A plot twist comes when the brother breaks the rules to save his sister from monsters. This might seem like an odd model for children, but there are a few ways to slice it up. One is to read this as the triumph of Mill over Kant: Universality be damned, the consequence of your sister not being eaten by monsters is more important. We might also look at this as the defeat of merely conventional rules at the feet of universal ones: “If monsters are going to eat you, escape by lying” could plausibly pass the “what if everybody did that” test.⁹ As you read, ask questions such as these:

- “Don’t tell lies” → Do you agree that this is a good rule?
- “Rules of the house” → Do you think these are good rules? Why?
- Jenny breaks rules → Is Jenny being bad for breaking rules? Is Ian good for following rules?
- “Until that night.” → What’s happening in this picture?
- Rug/tub/stove → Do you think it’s fair that these monsters are going to eat Jenny?
- “ALWAYS SAVE YOUR SISTER” → Do you agree that this should be a rule?
- Ian and Jenny backed into a corner → What do you think they should do?
- “You’re rulebreakers!” → What will happen since the monsters broke a rule?
- “A huge monster comes after you.” → Do you think Ian is lying now? Why’s he doing it?
- End → Do you think Ian was being good or bad when he told a lie? Why?

Game: What If Everybody Did That? Part II

Same game as before, but this time the children get to make up the rules, and everyone else gets to act them out. If they have trouble coming up with

something, you might prompt them a few times. This will likely get silly. If so, that's okay.

LESSON 6C. RESPECT

Storybook: Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*

Materials: "River," paper, drawing supplies

Goal: Children will demonstrate an understanding of the term "respect" by responding to at least one discussion question with a relevant answer.

Children will think about respect in their interactions with different people. To respect someone is to value or admire them for their qualities; to show respect is to treat someone with kindness or as an authority. When must one child respect another's autonomy? Can an adult respect a child without letting the child do whatever he or she wants? How? Can an adult fail to respect a child? What would this look like? How would a child view this failure of respect?

River Game

To get children thinking about respect and make sure they understand the word, teachers will act out a series of scenarios, and children will take sides around the river based on whether one person was respecting the other. Once they have taken sides, you can get them to explain why. Use scenarios such as these:

- Talking over someone (this ties back to the "listen" rule)
- One person having a hard day; the other person asking that person what's wrong
- Disagreeing about what to do and one person being unreasonably stubborn
- Calling someone names
- Disagreeing about what to do and coming to a compromise
- Child doesn't want to go to bed; parent patiently explains why it's necessary
- Child doesn't want to go to bed; parent orders child to do so without explanation

As children articulate reasons, guide them to the following considerations:

- Does X *value* what Y thinks or wants?
- Is Y doing what's *best for* Y (even if Y doesn't like it)?

Story

This classic story embodies a certain symmetry: Max rebels against his mother's well-meaning instructions and flees to the (imaginary?) land of the Wild Things, only to start acting like his mother. While we never get Mom's perspective, it is easy enough to imagine that she has Max's best interests in mind. If anything, it is harder to see how Max has the Wild Things' best interests in mind. Yet, he has a change of heart and seems to appreciate his mother in the end. It is quite a sophisticated work. Exploit these ambiguities to get children thinking about respect from different perspectives. Ask questions such as these:

- Chasing dog → Is Max being annoying?
- "Sent to bed without his supper" → Why did Max's mother send him to bed? Is she respecting him? Is he respecting her?
- Sailed off → Why is Max leaving?
- "Most wild thing of all" → Do the Wild Things respect Max?
- Mid-rumpus → Is Max respecting what the Wild Things want?
- "Sent to bed without their supper" (stop midpage) → Why did Max do this? Is he acting like his mom? Why did she send Max to bed?
- "Loved him best of all." → Who is that? But isn't he mad at his mom?
- Waved goodbye → Are the Wild Things respecting Max now?
- End → Who brought Max's supper to his room? Why did she do that?

Art Project: Draw a Time Someone Didn't Respect You

As children work, ask them questions such as these:

- How does each person feel?
- Does each person value the other?
- Does each person have the other's best interests in mind?

It's hard to say what situations children will come up with. If it's a case of an adult simply not letting them do what they want or punishing them for some instructional reason, help them to see either how this was for their own good or, if relevant, how their own misbehavior itself showed a lack of respect.

NOTES

1. While Mill himself did not do so, later Utilitarians have created such units: “hedons” (from the Greek for “pleasure”) and “dolors” (from the Latin for “sorrow”).

2. While Mill was an advocate for progressive causes in his day, particularly women’s rights, he was also involved in Britain’s East India Company, which made similar hard choices “for the greater good” of India.

3. The third formulation is, by Kant’s own admission, a combination of the first two and basically amounts to not stepping on other people’s toes when making life choices.

4. Or, to be more precise: mere things, mere people, and God. For Augustine, God was—of course—a person, or perhaps three persons. Likewise, human people are things. But we are not merely things insofar as we are alive, can reason, and so on. Further subdivisions are possible: rocks (merely exist); plants (exist and live); nonhuman animals (exist, live, perceive); humans (exist, live, perceive, reason); and so on.

5. Augustine, by contrast, usually starts with the scriptural cue that God is truth (e.g., John 14:6 “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”) and looks for times when we value things or people more than the truth. Politicians are perhaps the easiest example, particularly in our age of “alternative facts.” Kant avoids such snags by treating God as a rational agent on par with human beings, at least for purposes of morality.

6. We might see this concern for feelings as an alternative, Utilitarian basis for respect.

7. Those looking to read further should start with Kant’s *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Be warned: We read Kant today *despite* his writing style. Native German speakers have been known to read him in English in the hopes that the translator could figure out his sentence structure. Still, the *Groundwork* remains a classic. The edition of Gregor and Timmerman (2012) has a very helpful introduction in which Christine Korsgaard walks through each section of Kant’s argument.

Kant’s own preface sets out his project to find a rational groundwork for ethics and lays out what “rational” means in this instance. Section I then gives a somewhat intuitive discussion of the importance of intentions and ends with the thought experiment of the lying promise.

Section II returns to questions of reason as the sole basis for morality (4:406–413) followed by a classification of different forms of imperatives (4:413–419), all of which sets the stage for the categorical imperative in its formulation from universality (4:420–421), which Kant then applies to four thought experiments (4:422–425).

From here, Kant transitions into discussing questions of respect and the formulation from humanity (4:425–429), which he then uses to look at the same four thought experiments from a new perspective (4:429–4:30). The rest of Section II is taken up with the third formulation of the categorical imperative, which Kant argues flows from the first two.

Section III is the *Groundwork* at its least comprehensible and is omitted from most college ethics courses.

While Kant's Enlightenment ideals sometimes run contrary to current thinking about people on the margins, Kantian thought is alive and well today. You might look to John Rawls, whose thought experiment involving a "veil of ignorance" captures many of Kant's core insights while leaving behind some of its more dated baggage. When judging the fairness of a scenario, Rawls calls on us to put ourselves behind a "veil of ignorance" so that we do not know which position in that scenario we occupy. If we are okay with occupying any of them, Rawls declares that scenario fair.

8. This book is somewhat longer than most used in this curriculum. Teachers may want to plan accordingly. See also the appendix for alternative picture books to use

9. For the contrast of conventional and universal law, see discussion of Kohlberg's scheme of moral development (pp. 131–33).

Chapter 10

Lesson 7: Care

CAROL GILLIGAN ON CARE ETHICS

Kant, and the Enlightenment tradition he embodies, are to be commended for bringing a radically egalitarian perspective to the table. Still, we may wonder whether rationality or even the potential for rationality provides the best foundation for respect. Matters are compounded by the *way* Kant spells out rationality (i.e., as the ability to trade in universal concepts). Aren't there other ways to think rationally? And while we may prefer objectivity to favoritism or partisanship, do we value objectivity enough to make Kant's version of it the *only* ground of moral worth?

Here, perhaps, Mill does better. By looking to questions of pleasure and pain, he side-steps all such issues and even gives us reasons for valuing non-human animals apart from any uses humans may draw from them. Still, both sides of the Kant/Mill debate may strike us as weirdly impersonal. Again, we may applaud Mill's call to step over narrow self-interest and see ourselves as part of a greater good, but the *way* Mill does this is by calling us to see pleasure and pain as objective, almost disembodied qualities of the world. Mill seems to get something backward: Surely happiness is for the sake of people, not the other way around!

Over the last few decades, feminist philosophers have challenged the abstract, objective, disembodied way that traditional "male" ethical inquiry has been carried out. In its place, they have proposed an ethics of care that presents embodied relationships as a framework for ethical thinking.

Care ethics was born out of a collision of ethical theory and developmental psychology. This school of thought was first conceived by Carol Gilligan in response to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Working within the Enlightenment tradition, Kohlberg (1971) proposed a six-stage

developmental scheme for tracing how people of different ages deal with cases of moral conflict. To collect data, Kohlberg provided subjects a scenario in which a wife has a potentially fatal disease, a local pharmacist has a cure that he is charging far too much for, and the husband has to decide whether to steal the drug. The point isn't so much *what* subjects answer as *how* they justify their answers.

Kohlberg has a large and cross-cultural data set “proving” that individuals move through the following six stages as they formulate such justifications (see Table 10.1).

The basic idea is that individuals start out (1) not caring about the morality of their actions, just their consequences: The only reason to behave oneself is to avoid punishment; the only reason to be good is to get a sticker. Over time, (2) we come to strike deals with others, still not caring about the morality of actions, just their consequences.

After a while, we rise to the level of conventional morality, first (3) by developing a concern for how others think of us and then (4) coming to value following the rules of whatever state or social environment we find ourselves in. Some individuals, perhaps at the prompting of philosophers or political theorists, keep going and come to value that which conventional rules are grounded in. The first stop here is (5) to view the laws of actual societies as social contracts that we may willingly enter into; yet, this is still secondary to the ultimate moral state, (6) in which we can come to value moral laws on the basis of universal principles.

In placing universal principles at the end of this developmental scheme, Kohlberg basically assumed that Kant was right. Meanwhile, any scheme, insofar as it is *developmental*, suggests that later stages are better than earlier ones. When it comes to this particular scheme, progress is made as one's thinking moves from concrete embodied relationships to ever more abstract, disembodied principles.

Gilligan's initial problem with this scheme was not ideological but empirical. A psychologist working with groups of girls and women in the 1980s,

Table 10.1: Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Preconventional:	1) Avoid punishment/seek rewards
	2) You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours
Conventional:	3) "Good boy"/"Nice girl"
	4) Law and order
Postconventional:	5) Social contract
	6) Universal principle

she realized that, according to Kohlberg's scheme at least, girls and young women were stunted in their moral development when compared to their male counterparts. She also noticed that women were more likely than men to question the scenario given to them, resisting the either/or choice to steal or not to steal and probing details of how individual characters relate to each other.

Rather than accept the conclusion that women just aren't very good at moral reasoning, Gilligan questioned the Enlightenment ideas of objectivity that underlie Kohlberg's scheme. While universal principles and objective, impersonal standards may be useful when it comes to a government's approach to literal legislation, most ethical choices happen within the context of lived relationships. Gilligan, and those who have followed her, have sought to put relationships back at the forefront of our moral thinking.

In response to Kohlberg, Gilligan (1982) presented an alternative scheme based on "care" (i.e., the question of who comes first in our moral considerations). In this new scheme, people move through three stages marked by two times of transition (see [Table 10.2](#)).

According to this scheme, we all (1) start out egoists, (2) become altruists—about our children at least—and eventually (3) become something like Utilitarians as we come to balance care for ourselves with care for others. Gilligan marks out these two transitional phases, as they tend to be somewhat painful life-changing moments: (transition A) first-time parents realize that life as they knew it is over, and (transition B) as empty-nesters, they come to realize that it's okay for them to worry about themselves, too.

What should we make of the care perspective? A lot has happened since the 1980s in how we think about gender. Today, some of the generalizations about "masculine" versus "feminine" ways of thinking may seem a bit antiquated: There are plenty of women who value objectivity and plenty of men who care about relationships. Still, if we give Gilligan's theory its historical context (however recent that context may be), we can use "masculine" and

Table 10.2: Gilligan's Stages of Moral Development

<i>Moral Orientation</i>	<i>Characteristic Stage of Life</i>
1) Care for Self	Childhood
Transition A	Becoming a parent
2) Care for Other	Raising children
Transition B	Children move out
3) Care for Self and Other	Later life

“feminine” in somewhat metaphorical ways to talk about abstract versus embodied approaches to ethical reasoning.

We may wonder whether the two ways of doing things actually conflict or simply address different questions. Kant and Mill are most interested in judging the moral worth of individual actions taken in isolation from any context. Gilligan takes a more holistic approach, focusing on the broader context in which such decisions are made. In this sense, care ethics has more in common with ancient and medieval approaches than it does with Kant or Mill.

If there is a disagreement here, it isn’t so much between care ethics and the ethical theories of Kant and Mill as it is between the developmental schemes of Gilligan and Kohlberg. This is perhaps a bigger issue for parents, teachers, and school administrators than it is for children. Those of us charged with the moral education of the young need some criteria by which to assess their development.

Should we give higher points to abstract “masculine” or embodied “feminine” thinking? Should we encourage children to articulate “masculine” general principles or to offer “feminine” challenges to given scenarios? Perhaps there are still ways of combining elements of both. Readers are encouraged to use their moral imagination to figure out how.

When it comes to children, questions of care provide one more perspective for their conceptual tool boxes. In the lesson arcs that follow, we invite children to use Gilligan’s framework of care for thinking about moral choices. We also follow issues of care into a somewhat more applied case of thinking about what makes a family. In addition, we remember that the parents of these children are almost all at Gilligan’s transition A phase, learning to put their children’s needs ahead of their own.

Whether such considerations are literally or only metaphorically feminine, they frame issues in different ways than what has come before. As you engage children in discussion, we invite you to think about the difference between *care* and *respect*—between concern for those in our immediate circle and for people in general.¹

Discussion Questions for Teachers

1. Think of a time when you were faced with a decision with ethical implications. What did you take into account when making up your mind: rules, your reputation, others’ well-being, what it would do to your relationships? Are you more masculine (abstract) or feminine (contextualized) in your moral thinking?
2. Philosophers often proceed through disagreement. But how far can ideas from different ethical theories work together? What new and useful ideas

does care ethics bring to the table? What elements of Kant or Mill would you want to retain? Can you consistently bring these ideas together?

3. Who is the most morally mature person you can think of? Does Kohlberg or Gilligan make better sense of what it is about that person that is so commendable?
4. At this point, we have explored ethics through a host of different questions: What is a life well lived? What makes someone a good person? How should we raise our children? What makes an action right or wrong? Are there questions that should be asked that haven't been? Likewise, we have mined historical writing for theories and perspectives on ethics. Are there perspectives not addressed here that should be (e.g., from religions or non-Western philosophies)? How would these perspectives relate to what we have discussed?

CARING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Philosopher Nel Noddings has made a big contribution to the way we think about caring for children in group settings by applying Gilligan's care ethics ideas to caregiving relationships. She notes that children and the people who care for them enter the world of caring from a different door. First, the child is cared for, lovingly and well, in a network of social relationships. Next, the child learns (from those same carers) how to care for others. These loving relationships are the fundamental proving ground of morality. Noddings writes:

The key, central to care theory, is this: caring-about (or, perhaps a sense of justice) must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish. Although the preferred form of caring is cared-for, caring-about can help in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing it. Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs. *Caring-about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations.* (2002, 23–24, emphasis added)

In P4C, we acknowledge that one's knowledge of how to care for oneself and others is going to develop in the context of loving relationships.

A recent policy brief, summarizing hundreds of studies, supports what early educators and parents know: It's not the fanciness of the environment or the number of toys that best supports development but rather the quality of the relationships between adults, children, and peers (Landry et al. 2014). Early childhood educators who are responsive and sensitive to children's

needs; listen and respond to their conversations; and consider their individual differences in temperament, age, and interests send children on to higher grades with better social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Finch, Johnson, and Phillips 2015).

For the very young, continuity of caring relationships is a powerful predictor of outcomes. P4C teachers should be people who are in relationship with the children over time; P4C techniques should be carried over by classroom teachers themselves. In the primary care model, schools ensure that very young children are cared for by one or two adults and that they stay with these adults for as long as possible. Learning happens best in a context of caring and safety.

TEACHER REFLECTION

In most school environments, teachers make every effort to connect with and care for the child in the context of his or her family. How teachers relate to each family greatly influences a child's experience in the classroom. Most teachers have worked with families that have seemed "difficult" to reach, or to build connections to. This lesson offered us insights into the child's understanding of family and thus a window into how we might better connect with each individual family unit.

Our use of the story *A Mother for Choco* is a good example. We had a Caucasian family who adopted a child of color. The awareness of the parent's perspective on this provided an opportunity to connect with the parent and build a bridge through experiences. As the children experienced the story, teachers were able to reflect on and discuss with the parent how children reacted during the activities and how we could enhance the child's understanding through additional activities with other families who have differences and similarities.

We anticipated that philosophical discussions with the children might spark new conversations with parents. In the end, communication and connection to the family grew, and as a result, parents and teachers became more invested in their relationship.

LESSON 7A. CARE FOR SELF VERSUS CARE FOR OTHER

Storybook: Barbara Odanaka, *Skateboard Mom*

Materials: Everyday school materials (art supplies, dishes, etc.)

Goal: Children will practice perspective taking by verbalizing a child's and adult's point of view.

In this lesson, we will get children actively thinking about care in terms of who puts whose interests first. From this perspective, most children are used to caring for themselves and having adults care for them, as well. Push them to think from others' perspectives and to describe care relationships. To this end, they will play a game that inverts the normal child/adult relationship.

Game: Teachers and Children Switch Places

To get children to think about caring for others, teachers will play children, and children will play teachers. Given typical student-to-teacher ratios, it is probably best if only a handful of children do this at a time. Teachers, this is your chance to show children what it is like to put someone else first. The key is to engineer scenarios in which children, as pretend teachers, will have to do something they don't want to. For instance:

- Two children get into a fight over a toy. What does the teacher do?
- It's naptime, but the child doesn't want to go to sleep.
- The teacher gets a phone call from a parent; while the teacher talks, the child needs to go to the bathroom.

Start the activity by asking children what "care" means to them and about times that people have cared for them or they have cared for others. Then move into the role-play. As the opportunities arise, ask questions such as these:

- Is the teacher <name> caring for the child? How?
- Who am I <the child> caring for? For myself? My friend? My teacher?
- Is it good if <name> only cares for himself or herself? Is he or she being a good friend?

Story

This book beautifully illustrates relationships between generations via a mom who doesn't want to let go of her youthful skateboarding days. By shifting from the school context of the game to the family context of the story, children get to play with ideas of care from a slightly different perspective. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “Gleam in Mom’s eye” → How does the boy feel? How does his mom feel?
- “Popped it on her head” → Why are the boy’s ears turning red? (This could spark a conversation about expectations of parents and children. See if you can get children to relate their own experiences to it.)
- “Not looking back” → Is it okay that his mom left with his new skateboard? Why?
- “Skateboard CRAZED” → Is she a good mom? Does she care for herself or her son?
- “A flying trapeze?” → Why does she like this skateboard so much?
- “Off I flew” → What is the boy going to do?
- “Teach me to skate” → Why is the mom sorry? Do your parents ever apologize to you?
- “WAS ALL SHE COULD SAY” → Does the boy care for his mom? Does the mom care for the boy?
- “A gleam in her eye” → What now?
- End → Was the boy’s mom a good mom? Was the boy a good son? Why?

LESSON 7B. FAMILY: CARE VERSUS LOOKING ALIKE

Storybook: Keiko Kasza, *A Mother for Choco*

Materials: “River”; a variety of dolls (men, women, children, dog, cat, fish, etc.); paper; glue; paper cutouts of people from a diverse range of ages, genders, and races (along with some animals, team sport equipment, etc.)

Goal: Children will contribute ideas to a schema of what it means to be a family.

In this lesson, children practice developing and talking about a schema of a family. A schema is a conception of what is common, general, or essential to all members of a class. At some points in history, it was easy to say what a family looks like: father, mother, and children of similar racial background. In today’s age of single parents, second marriages, same-sex marriages, and mixed-race adoptions, matters are more complicated.

But if we can’t fall back on surface appearances, what are we left with? One answer here is “care.” Again, the point is not to teach the “right answer” but to get children thinking critically and discussing the issues. A second goal is to help children move past stereotypical definitions of “family.”

River Game: What Does a Family Look Like?

Start by asking one child, “What does every family need to have to be a family?” Pick out dolls to illustrate this. Have everyone whose family looks like that stand on one side of the river; everyone whose family looks different, stand on the other side. Once the children have taken sides, ask questions such as these:

- How does your family look different from this?
- Does every family *need* to have a mommy, daddy, grandma, and so on?

For the second round, pick another child you know to have a different sort of family. If the children reach a consensus, you can muddy the waters by asking about number of children, no children, pets, grandparents, friends, teachers, neighbors, and so on.

Keep in mind that this question does not have a clear-cut answer. When thinking about our families, some of us would not stop with relatives (whether by blood, marriage, or adoption) but allow some close friends into the circle of our “family.” Yet, we would certainly draw the line *somewhere*. The question is: Where? Neighbors? Fellow citizens? Members of our religion? All human beings? All living things? The goal of this game should be to leave children a bit puzzled and primed for the story.

Story

This story, a favorite among the mixed-race adoption community, presents an updated version of the well-known story *Are You My Mother?* by P. D. Eastman. In the older story, a young bird hatches and asks a number of animals, and even a backhoe, whether they are his mother. In the end, he finds his real mother, who is a bird. The moral of this story: Your mother is someone who looks like you.

In Kasza’s version, a somewhat more exotic bird engages in a similar search but finally finds his mother in a bear who loves and cares for him. While the moral of the story is a bit more clear than is ideal for sparking P4C discussion, it should help move children beyond superficial features of family. As you read, encourage children to reflect on what care means in the context of a parent–child relationship. While reading, ask questions such as these:

- “Set off to find her” → What do you think Choco’s mother will look like? (Start with children who haven’t read the book.)

- Giraffe/penguin:
 - Before reading the page → Can this be Choco's mother? Why or why not?
 - After reading the page → Is this a good reason this isn't Choco's mother?
- "Couldn't find a mother who looks like him" → How do you think Choco feels?
- "Mrs. Bear didn't look like him at all." → Is Choco right that Mrs. Bear can't be his mother? Why? (This question should cause some disagreement, particularly if some children have read the book. Press the children to give reasons for their answers.)
- "What would she do?" → What do you think? What do mommies do?
- "You?" → Do you think Mrs. Bear can be Choco's mommy? Why or why not?
- End → So what *does* a family look like?

Collage: Building a Family

Present children with paper cutouts of people from a range of ages, genders, and races. If you like, throw in some animals as potential pets and bits of equipment, such as baseball bats, if they want to think in terms of teams. If the clothes people are wearing suggest different jobs, sports, and so on, all the better. As children work, ask them questions such as these:

- Who are all these people?
- Does every family need to have a <point to individual figure>?
- Why does your family look different from your friend's family? Are they both real families? Why?
- Does this one care for this one? (It's best to start with obviously wrong relationships, like babies caring for adults.)

NOTE

1. Compared to other theories covered here, care ethics has only recently started to take shape. If it has classic texts, Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) are a good place to start. The anthology of Kittay and Feder (2003) also provides a helpful collection of essays.

Postscript

Education as Growth

As described in [chapter 1](#), Rollins's P4C project is an outgrowth of the college's commitment to the pragmatic liberal arts and progressive education. Coming full circle, we suggest that Dewey provides a useful framework for thinking about this curriculum as a whole. In his 1916 essay, "Education as Growth," Dewey offers a view of lifelong learning that fuses Aristotle's ideas about habits and Darwin's theory of organisms' ongoing adaptation to their environments.¹ According to Dewey, growth happens in two directions.

Children grow by becoming more adult, as they refine the habits by which they interact with their environments. This allows children to interact more deftly with their physical environments through walking, using tools, drawing, and so on, as well as their social environments. It is the latter that we see so clearly in P4C, as children refine their habits and their skills of engaging their peers in useful dialogue. In the process, they become more facile in dealing with themselves, articulating and revising their own feelings, interests, and ideas. They learn to "think" before they "respond."

Adults, meanwhile, grow by becoming more childlike. To understand this, Dewey calls on us not to think of "immaturity" as merely the lack of what adults have but as a positive capacity in its own right, the ability to grow that children naturally display. As Dewey puts it:

The acquiring of habits is due to an original plasticity of our natures: to our ability to vary responses till we find an appropriate and efficient way of acting. Routine habits, and habits that possess us instead of our possessing them, are habits which put an end to plasticity. They mark the close of power to vary. (1916, section 2)

This is a sharp departure from Aristotle, who set out to identify and instill the habits that were “right” given individuals’ circumstances. (Aristotle also held that the physical world has always been here and that plant and animal species have always had the form they have presently.) Dewey, following Darwin, calls out and shoots down Aristotle’s assumptions that there is a fixed “right” way of doing things and that we can identify a mean and then stop thinking about it.

Adults, according to Dewey, stop growing, not because we possess the wrong habits, but because our habits, whatever they are, “possess us!” Even the best habits become a problem when our environment changes and we do not. In Rollins’s P4C project, we saw this over and over again in our undergraduate student leaders.

Having successfully made their way through the K–12 system, students arrive at Rollins quite good at “doing school”: displaying their learning in writing essays, completing standardized tests, and answering questions in class. What they often aren’t so good at is formulating questions and articulating their own confusion, to say nothing of sharing it with people. In this, Rollins is not unique. As Augustine would put it, undergraduates had a good deal of “unlearning” to do (*Against the Academic Skeptics* 3.38). Our undergraduates’ work with children helped them reconnect with their wonder at the world and embrace the fact that it is, at times, a quite perplexing place.²

We saw this in the teaching staff of the Hume House CDC as well. Not to toot our own horn, but it is hard to imagine a group of more innovative, responsive, child-centered teachers. Yet, through the P4C project, even this group who eat progressive ideals for breakfast came head to head with their own assumptions about what was too abstract or developmentally inappropriate for young children.

Time and again, our teachers realized that, with proper scaffolding, the children were capable of more than they thought. Does that mean that these were bad teachers before the P4C project? Not at all! Does it mean that they could benefit from shaking things up? Yes! And the result has transformed the culture of the school. We are grateful to our children for all they have taught us about how to be students and how to be teachers.

Growth, according to Dewey, is thus a cycle, as children become ever more adult and adults become ever more childlike. While that has the makings of a nice meme, Dewey’s point is radical: “Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself” (1916, summary). Dewey’s idea is that growth itself is the end, the purpose of life. This growth extends far beyond the classroom walls, and it underlines the immense importance of what teachers do.

Dewey’s conclusion to “Education as Growth” provides a fitting *non-*conclusion to the present work as well: “The criterion of the value of school

education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact” (1916, summary).

NOTES

1. As with Mill’s works, this essay was written in English, and its copyright is now expired. It is freely available online.
2. At *Metaphysics* 1.2, Aristotle identifies wonder and perplexity as the beginning of philosophy. See also Plato, *Theatetus* 155d.

Appendix

**Overview of Lessons and Alternative
Storybooks**

Table A1: Overview of Lessons

Lesson	Goal	Opening Game (Materials)	Storybook (Alternative)	Concluding Game/Art Project (Materials)
1a) Best versus Best At	Children will show an understanding that the value of objects is related to their intended use. Children will state the difference in meaning between “best” and “best at.”	Which Toy Is Best? (Assorted toys, a blue ribbon for each toy)	Crockett Johnson, <i>Blue Ribbon Puppies</i> (Sam McBratney, <i>Yes We Can</i> ; Alice Schertle, <i>Little Blue Truck</i>)	Which Toy Is Best At . . . ? (Same as opening game)
1b) Good versus Good At	Children will explain the difference in meaning between being “good” morally and being “good at” an activity.	Dinosaur Sorting and Charades (Assortment of toy dinosaurs)	Julia Donaldson, <i>Tyrannosaurus Drip</i> (Michael Hall, <i>Red: A Crayon’s Story</i>)	What Kind of Dinosaur Would You Be? (Assortment of toy dinosaurs)

1 c) Habit	Children will define the term "habit" by giving an example from daily life. Children will give examples of good and bad habits. Children will understand that habits can be changed through repeated action.	Simon Says (None)	Arnold Lobel, <i>"Tomorrow,"</i> from <i>Days with Frog and Toad</i> (Ashley <i>Spires, The Things Lou Couldn't Do</i>)	Charades: Act Out Habits You Want to Have (None)
1 d) Becoming Our Best Selves	Children will demonstrate connections between being good, being good at, and practicing habits by explaining the dragon's experiences in this story.	Discussion (None)	Dan Bar-el, <i>Not Your Typical Dragon</i> (Leo Lionni, A <i>Color of His Own</i>)	Build a Dragon Out of Legos (Legos)

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Opening Game (Materials)</i>	<i>Storybook (Alternative)</i>	<i>Concluding Game/Art Project (Materials)</i>
2a) Looking Brave versus Being Brave	Children will demonstrate an understanding of bravery, including being brave and acting brave, by responding to questions about the story.	River Game ("River," figurines depicting different people)	Robert Munsch, <i>Paper Bag Princess</i> (Sarah and Ian Hoffman, <i>Jacob's New Dress</i>)	River Game/ Role-Play with Figurines (Same)
2b) Bravery versus Fear	Children will build and state definitions of "bravery," "fear," and "danger." Children will identify one other person's view and tell how theirs is different.	Blindfolding (Blindfold)	Arnold Lobel, "Dragons & Giants," from <i>Frog and Toad Together</i> (Carolyn Crimi, <i>There Might Be Lobsters</i>)	Draw a Time You Were Brave (Paper, drawing supplies)
2c) Brave versus Reckless	Children will tell the difference between brave and reckless behavior.	Scary Animal Charades (None)	Kevin Henkes, <i>Sheila Rae, the Brave</i> (Ed Vere, <i>Max the Brave</i>)	Sculpt a Time You Did Something Reckless (Clay)

3a) Being Happy with Enough versus Wanting More	Children will show that they understand the vocabulary of comparison and moderation ("too little," "enough/ happy with," "too much"). Children will identify a time when seeking <i>more</i> can have negative consequences, both for the person seeking and for other people.	Building a Tower from Blocks, Part I (Large building blocks, not Legos)	Doctor Seuss, <i>Yertle the Turtle</i> (Shel Silverstein, <i>The Giving Tree</i>)	Building a Tower from Blocks, Part II (Same)
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<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Opening Game (Materials)</i>	<i>Storybook (Alternative)</i>	<i>Concluding Game/Art Project (Materials)</i>
3b) Too Many Cookies?	Children will use the vocabulary of comparison and moderation during a hands-on activity, identifying too much, too little, and just right. Children will reflect an understanding of the term "will power."	Mixing Paint (Different-colored paints, cups for mixing, stir sticks, brushes, "river" needed during story)	Arnold Lobel, "Cookies," from <i>Frog and Toad Together</i> (Eric Carle, <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>)	Paint a Perfect Meal (Paint mixed in opening game, many small paper plates)
3c) Self-Control and Fear	Children will demonstrate an understanding of willpower and self-control by identifying at least one example from the story, activity, or their own lives.	(A Variation on) Red Light, Green Light (Floor space)	Mike McClintock, <i>A Fly Went By</i> (Toni and Slade Morrison, <i>Please, Louise</i>)	Draw a Time You Used Self-Control (Paper, drawing supplies)

3d) Self-Control and Anger	Children will generalize their understanding of self-control by applying it to controlling their anger.	Opposite Game (None)	Mercer Mayer, / <i>Was So Mad</i> (Julia Cook, <i>My Mouth Is a Volcano</i>)	Draw a Time You Were Mad (Paper, drawing supplies)
4a) Fun Friends versus Helpful Friends	Children will name two different reasons for having friends. Children will identify, or agree on, one thing they can do to be a good friend.	Blindfolded Mr. Potato Head (Blindfolds, Mr. Potato Head sets, enough for groups of two or three children each)	Julia Donaldson, <i>Sharing a Shell</i> (Peter Catalanotto, <i>Emily's Art</i>)	What Will You Bring to School? (Model school, clay, beads, found items, etc.)

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Opening Game (Materials)</i>	<i>Storybook (Alternative)</i>	<i>Concluding Game/Art Project (Materials)</i>
4b) One-Sided Friendship	Children will question the mutuality of friendship by participating in a discussion of good and bad friends.	Charades: Act Out Something Nice You've Done for a Friend ("River")	Jon J. Muth, "Uncle Ry and the Moon," from <i>Zen Shorts</i> (Kevin Henkes, Jessica Arnold Lobel, "The Dream," from <i>Frog and Toad Together</i>)	Draw a Good Friend and a Bad Friend (Paper, drawing supplies)
4c) Do Friends Change You?	Children will reflect on how friends change each other and apply this to their own lives.	River Game: What's Your Favorite Thing to Do? ("River")	Leo Lionni, <i>Little Blue and Little Yellow</i> (Aaron Blabey, <i>Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley</i>)	Paint What You Like Doing with Your Friends (One large piece of paper for each group of two or three children, one cup of paint and brush per child)

4d) The Important Thing about a Friend	Children will identify characteristics of a friend.	Opening Game and Story Combined in One ("River")	Margaret Wise Brown, <i>The Important Book</i> (Kevin Henkes, <i>Chester's Way</i> ; B. Wiseman, <i>Morris the Moose</i>)	Friend Book (Colored pencils, one piece of paper for each child with "The important thing about a friend is . . ." written across the top)
5a) The Greater Good	Children will use the terms "good for me" versus "good for everybody" in discussion, giving at least one example.	Musical Chairs with a Twist (Chairs, something to play music)	Leo Lionni, <i>It's Mine!</i> (Marcus Pfister, <i>Rainbow Fish</i>)	Drawing a Rainbow and Frogs (One piece of paper per child, fewer rainbow-colored crayons than children present)
5b) Higher versus Lower Pleasures	Children will be able to share their ideas about why the mice changed their opinions of Frederick over the course of the story.	River Game: If You Could Bring One Thing with You on a Long Trip, What Would It Be? ("River")	Leo Lionni, <i>Frederick</i> (Diana Hendry, <i>The Very Busy Day</i> ; Eric Carle, <i>Pancake, Pancakes!</i>)	Gingerbread House (Graham crackers, frosting, candy)

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Opening Game (Materials)</i>	<i>Storybook (Alternative)</i>	<i>Concluding Game/Art Project (Materials)</i>
5c) Competing Pleasures	Children will participate in the discussion about competing pleasures by offering at least one relevant answer or example.	n/a	Mark Pett, <i>The Girl and the Bicycle</i> (Meribeth Boelts, <i>Those Shoes</i>)	Working on the Playground (Playground set with one high-profile toy surrounded by a bunch of other toys that need to be put away)
6a) Outcome versus Intent	Children will demonstrate an understanding of intent versus result, or "meant to," by providing at least one relevant example during discussion.	Telephone (None)	Sheryl Webster, <i>What Small Rabbit Heard</i> (Mo Willems, <i>Should I Share My Ice Cream?</i> ; Arnold Lobel, "Ice Cream," from <i>Frog and Toad All Year</i>)	Draw a Time You Intended to Do One Thing and Something Else Happened (Paper, drawing supplies)

6b) Rules	Children will practice using the first formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, framed as "What would happen if there was a rule that . . . ?" by giving at least one relevant answer.	What If Everybody Did That? Part I (None)	Mac Barnett, <i>Rules of the House</i> (Toni and Slade Morrison, <i>The Book of Mean People</i>)	What If Everybody Did That? Part II (None)
6c) Respect	Children will demonstrate an understanding of the term "respect" by responding to at least one discussion question with a relevant answer.	River Game: Is This Respecting People? ("River")	Maurice Sendak, <i>Where the Wild Things Are</i> (Cheri Meiners, <i>Respect and Take Care of Things</i> ; Toni and Slade Morrison, <i>The Big Box</i>)	Draw a Time Someone Didn't Respect You (Paper, drawing supplies)

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Opening Game (Materials)</i>	<i>Storybook (Alternative)</i>	<i>Concluding Game/Art Project (Materials)</i>
7a) Care for Self versus Care for Other	Children will practice perspective taking by verbalizing a child's and adult's point of view.	Teachers and Children Switch Places (Everyday school materials: art supplies, dishes, etc.)	Barbara Odanaka, <i>Skateboard Mom</i> (James Marshall, <i>Miss Nelson Is Missing</i>)	None
7b) Family: Care versus Looking Alike	Children will contribute ideas to a schema of what it means to be a family.	River Game: What Does a Family Look Like? ("River," variety of dolls: men, women, children, dog, cat, fish, etc.)	Keiko Kasza, A <i>Mother for Choco</i> (Kateryn Cave, <i>Something Else</i> ; Jamie Lee Curtis, <i>Tell Me Again about the Night I Was Born</i>)	Collage: Building a Family (Paper; glue; paper cutouts of people from a diverse range of ages, genders, and races, along with some animals, team sport equipment, etc.)

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